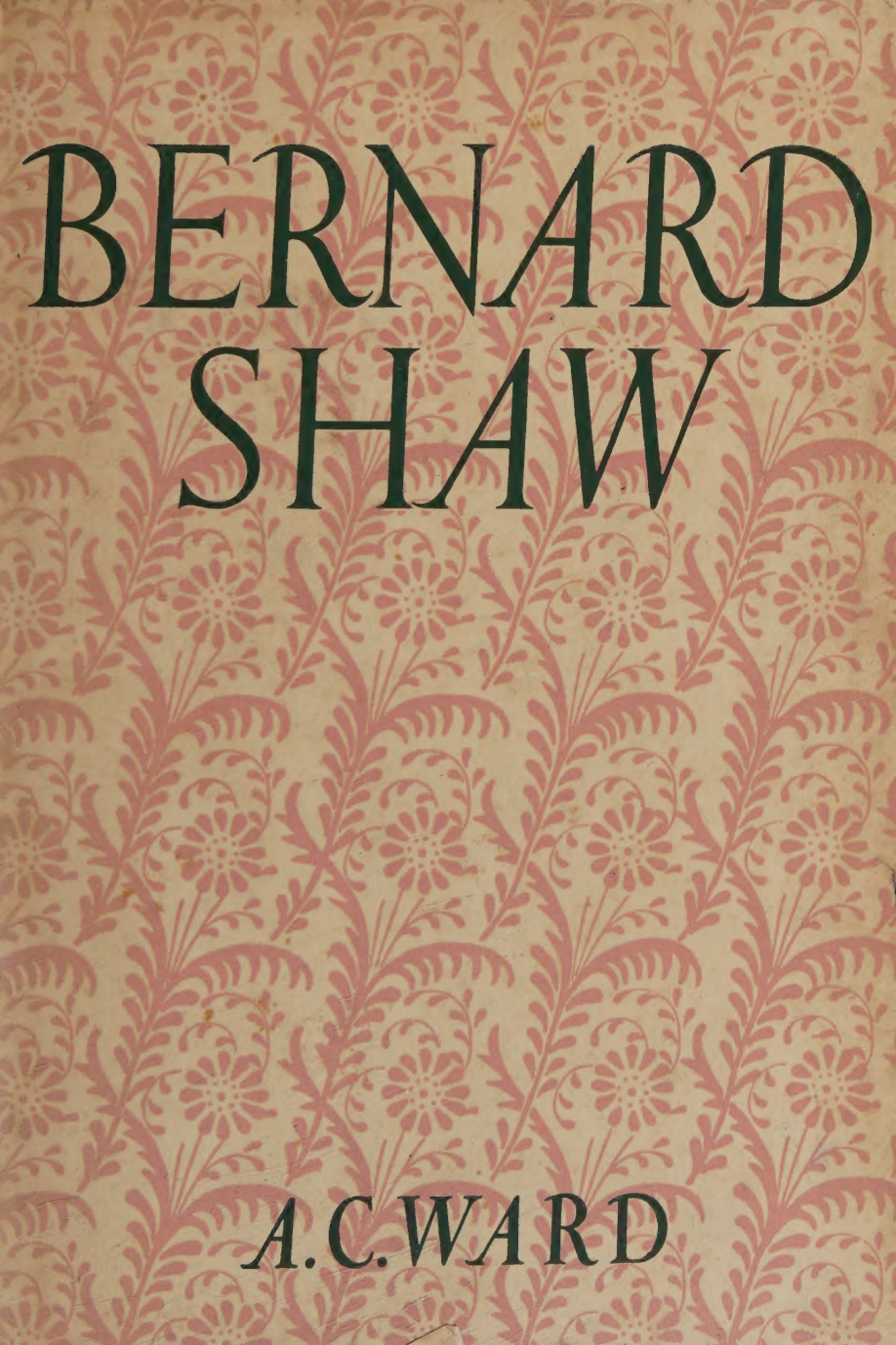




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BERNARD SHAW

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To the memory of
BERNARD SHAW
who taught me to do
my own thinking

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Chapter One

BERNARD SHAW AND THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

THOUGH Bernard Shaw claimed that there was behind his plays a thought-out sociology, and said that for art's sake alone he would not have faced the toil of writing so much as a single sentence, his place in literature will in the long run be determined by his quality as an imaginative artist, not by his stature as a political thinker and social reformer. Posterity has always appeared to be singularly unimpressed by either political or religious zeal, except when it is distilled in a form which offers aesthetic satisfaction.

Yet whatever ground there may be for arguing that the after-fame of Shaw will depend on the literary quality of his writings, the argument can only be sustained if it is recognized that their aesthetic merit is the outcome of Shaw's fervent belief in the righteousness of his multiple crusade for a better and saner world. While a conviction of righteousness does not of itself produce art, it is nevertheless true that art is rarely generated in a moral vacuum. So although posterity is unlikely to concern itself greatly with the contemporary political, sociological, and religious background of Shaw's work, some brief account of it must be given, since that background provided his material, however thoroughly the material was changed in the creative process. Shaw's great gifts of eloquence and humour and wit could only

be exercised upon important human issues. He mocked solemnity, even his own; but he never mocked seriousness, and never turned his eyes away from the present world in his desire to bring a new world to birth.

When Bernard Shaw was born in 1856, Queen Victoria had been on the throne not quite twenty years. Forty-five years of the Victorian Age were still to come. Motor cars as a general means of transport, aeroplanes (even in their experimental stage), and cinemas were still some half-century away. The English family had no cause for any tremor of suspicion that within a lifetime it would be shaken to the roots. Of that, indeed, Shaw himself had no expectation even as late as 1898, for the Preface to his first plays published in that year is in part a diagnosis of English home life, with the family cut off from any but rare visits to the theatre 'as an exceptional way of spending an evening': 'For the sake of the unhappy prisoners of the home, then,' Shaw wrote, 'let my plays be printed as well as acted.'

The vital change among the many brought about in the British way of living during Shaw's lifetime was undoubtedly the break-up of family life. If the family had continued to hold together under parental discipline and domination, many currents of change would have been nullified. While it is possible that the family might at length have disintegrated through the operation of internal stresses, the process would have been incomparably slower than in fact it was under assault from outside forces. Among those forces the most powerful—and indeed the one from which all the rest grew—was the spread of schooling promoted by the Education Act of 1870, the first British measure for national (elementary) education.

The Act was a long-term blessing accompanied by a number of short-term curses from which we must look to suffer for a long time yet to come. The change from illiteracy to literacy can be effected in a few years; but literacy is not education, though it may be the first step; and literacy does not guarantee enlightenment, the true goal of education.

It was certain, though in 1870 it may not have been foreseen, that as soon as a 'reading public' grew up enterprising men would scent the commercial profit to be made from the new part-educated multitude. Inasmuch as the populace had been taught to read, it was a reasonable deduction that interest and curiosity had been aroused in them on a modest level of intelligence. For this new public the existing newspapers and periodicals were too stolid in presentation, too limited in range of topics, too sober in tone, and too expensive. The first to move into the enlarged journalistic field was George Newnes, who started *Tit-Bits* in 1881. Attaining immediate and lasting popularity, this apparently innocuous weekly paper did a far from negligible amount of mental damage by fostering a taste for scraps of uncorrelated information. This taste became a habit which spread and persisted and at length hardened into a basic convention of printed and spoken popular journalism—that the attention of the British public cannot be held to any subject for more than a few minutes. The depressive effect of this mass cultivation of grasshopper minds upon the national standard of intelligence is beyond computation. At least one national newspaper with a daily circulation running into millions has laid down for the guidance of its staff the axiom that the average mental age of the paper's readers is not above fourteen, and that all writing in its columns should be on that schoolchild

level—with no endeavour to raise the readers' mental age from year to year.

The impact of the early stages of this journalistic revolution upon Victorian family life can be imagined if not measured. It must have knocked holes through many household walls and afforded enticing glimpses of the outside world of adventure and romance—and also of greed and crime. When Alfred Harmsworth (the future Viscount Northcliffe) brought out *Answers* in 1888 as a rival to *Tit-Bits*, the new weekly did not flourish until it began to offer large money prizes in a guessing competition—the first gentle titillation of an appetite which some fifty years later grew into the vast gambling hunger stimulated by big-business football pools. In the Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* (1898) Bernard Shaw wrote: 'Ten years of cheap reading have changed the English from the most stolid nation in Europe to the most theatrical and hysterical.' Two years later the bacchic frenzy with which the relief of Mafeking was celebrated in England provided evidence to support Shaw's indictment.

If it be true that every excess ultimately produces its own corrective, a time may come when the influence of the new type of journalism established by Newnes and Harmsworth will be judged as, on balance, good. Without its stimulus, national education might have made less headway at a slower pace, though in all probability with more sense of direction as well as more responsibility. Yet, whether education proceeded soberly on pedagogically approved lines, or skipped errantly with the Autolycuses of Fleet Street, it was bound to pass through the region of semi-education with all its attendant handicaps: moving scores of thousands from apathetic contentment to febrile unrest and envy; from

the passive performance of duties to the positive assertion of rights; from social abjection to class arrogance; from the satisfactions of self-entertainment to the sterility of commercialized pleasure; from the innocence of things unknown to the ignorance of things misknown. And at however slow a pace education developed, it would inevitably have stirred curiosities, excited desires, created tastes and aspirations that the Victorian home could never satisfy.

By the end of the nineteenth century the ferment produced by the combined influence of popular education and popular journalism was augmented by the social influence of a mechanical contrivance—the safety bicycle. This machine began the great exodus from the home which the motor cycle and motor car were to make almost universal in the new century. The bicycle was women's great emancipator; by giving them the freedom of both town and country it benefited women far more than the freedom of parliament which they secured later after years of painful struggle.

The militant Women's Suffrage campaign which began in 1905 was swept aside in 1914 by the beginning of the First World War. When the franchise was extended to women after the war, it was rather as an acknowledgment of wartime services than as a triumphant sequel to the suffrage campaign. That the vote should have been denied to women for so long and that women should have regarded the vote as a kind of passport to paradise on earth are in retrospect equally astonishing. The historical significance of the militant suffrage movement seems now to be in the deplorable lesson which others learned from it—namely, that political violence may be as profitably employed by malcontents for evil ends as

for good; a lesson whose consequences were not seen in the fullness of horror until the 1930s.

Political violence might well have become endemic in Britain, as it has elsewhere, but for Shaw's efforts to find a substitute in political education. At the time of his settlement in London in 1876 the principles of revolutionary socialism were well to the fore. Karl Marx had been living and writing in London for many years as an exile from Germany, and after the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 there had been an influx of French refugees. In 1881 the first English socialist organization—the Democratic Federation—was founded by H. M. Hyndman, a disciple of Marx. Later its name was changed to the Social Democratic Federation, and among its members was William Morris, whose immense prestige as poet and protean master-craftsman was of immense advantage in bringing within the orbit of the Federation many who would otherwise have given a wide berth to all radicals, for 'Radical' was then the current political boggy-word. Morris broke away from the Social Democratic Federation in 1884 to start the Socialist League, but earlier in that year a body that was to have a far longer life, the Fabian Society, had been established. It began to issue a series of political tracts to which Shaw contributed liberally. The fame of the Fabian Tracts was mainly due to his flair for giving enduring literary quality to almost everything he wrote, so that what would otherwise have been speedily forgotten—in company with most propagandist writings—is preserved among his works in the volume called *Essays in Fabian Socialism*, in which much uncommon common sense is vented in good prose. The Fabian Society began and was named several months before Shaw joined it. Its title was explained on the covers of the early Tracts:

‘For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain, and pointless.’ This waiting policy of the Fabians was in contrast to the more restless aggressive policy of the organizations sponsored by Hyndman and Morris, though the phrase ‘you must strike hard’ was not used simply as a rhetorical metaphor in the early days of the Fabian Society. There were among its members some at least who believed that the unarmed masses could at need—somehow, somewhen, by some inherent justice and righteousness of their cause—prevail in physical combat with the police and soldiers of a constituted anti-socialist government. This illusion was not dispelled until the day which came to be known, in the easily heroic terminology of peaceable times, as Bloody Sunday. On that day, 13 November 1887, a mass gathering planned to vindicate the right to assemble and make speeches in Trafalgar Square, London, was dispersed by police and cavalry. The bloodshed was confined to the effects of truncheon blows and accidental trappings and jostlings of a crowd out of control, but the experience convinced Shaw, who was an uninjured participant, that mob action against a disciplined force would always be purposeless and productive of nothing but damaging defeat for the insurgents. From that time Shaw’s Fabianism was no longer a matter of waiting patiently until the time should come to strike hard, but of teaching persistently until capitalism succumbed to the enlightenment spread abroad by political education.

Between Bloody Sunday and the General Strike which came in 1926—a period of forty years—there were

periods of considerable industrial distress, with mass unemployment and chronic poverty. But, notwithstanding labour stoppages which from time to time generated ugly displays of mass anger, there was no serious civil disturbance in Britain. By 1950 it could be said that under a Labour Government a bloodless social revolution had been at least in part effected. The fact that this revolution did not progress entirely without weakening or destroying ancient liberties and personal rights which the British had for centuries cherished and defended, and that it could hardly have progressed at all but for the undermining of the old régime by two wars in which bloodshed was worldwide, does not sweep away the claim that the Fabian Society, acting as the nurse and mentor of future Labour-party statesmen, safeguarded Britain from the excesses of revolutionary violence experienced in other lands.

English Liberalism, from which Radicalism and Socialism derived, and afterwards diverged under the impact of continental zealotry, was closely associated in basic principle with Nonconformity. The Nonconformists or Dissenters—whether organized as Quakers, Congregationalists, Wesleyan Methodists, Baptists, or lumped together in undifferentiating common speech as Puritans—opposing what they believed to be the spurious authoritarianism of the sacerdotal Christian communities, were led also to oppose the privileged social classes. As the parson was often the crony of the squire or the dependent of the lord of the manor, dissent from the established social and political order was consistent with dissent from the Established Church. But dissent in both kinds also remained consistent with Christian conviction and piety: i.e. with the puritanism of the dissenting chapels. By the middle of the nine-

teenth century there was a well-defined religious and political division, with Church and upper-class Conservatism on the one side, Chapel and working-class Liberalism on the other.

Not until Marxist materialism took root in Britain did an unbridgeable gulf yawn between politics and religion. In the later part of the century liberal intellectuals gave much earnest consideration to high principled ethical substitutes for Christianity, which was challenged as unacceptable to human reason. Rationalism, agnosticism, atheism were embraced with bleak determination by relatively small numbers, some of whom endeavoured to propagate in speech and writing one or other of those 'reasonable' creeds, and in a few instances the blasphemy laws were invoked against them. But a religion based upon ethics and ratiocination is not less exacting than religions requiring faith in a supernatural agency; indeed, a religion which demands an unremitting standard of personal conduct and yet offers no rewarding after-life cannot hope to displace Christianity and its promise of heaven. The rationalist movement was not without permanent effect, however. It helped to shake the Christian structure, even though it failed to build any edifice of its own. The stored authority and prestige of the Churches and Chapels of the various Christian denominations kept orthodox belief well in the van of national life, until the First World War removed millions of young people from the home influences that had been the mainstay of Christianity, and faced them with wholesale agony and death which appeared to very many as inconsistent with the Christian idea of God. To the slowly developing scepticism of the pre-war period was now added a vast mushroom growth of cynicism. The harvest was, in some directions, com-

plete indifference to every aspect of religion; but in one quarter at least, from the 1920s onward, a positive anti-religious campaign developed. Communism, centering on Moscow as Catholicism centered on Rome, identified religion with Capitalist oppression and exploitation and adopted the slogan 'Religion is the opium of the masses', inviting the retort 'Politics is the poison of the people'.

The implication that the masses would shed irrational beliefs if they abandoned the orthodox faith was not borne out by experience. Political creeds wholly irrational in character and requiring an absolute irrational obedience from their adherents became new religions, while multitudes of the non-political turned to spiritualism, to astrology, and to substitute religions of various kinds. A generation which had received more schooling than any preceding generation in the history of the world relapsed into credulity and superstition which had hitherto been stigmatized as penalties of heathen ignorance. Reason was again dethroned and the old school of social reformers who put their trust in 'equality of opportunity', 'full employment', and other devices for the Welfare State, became conscious that a material utopia cannot endure in a spiritual vacuum, and that on every social level the enjoyment of individual rights is inseparable from the recognition of individual responsibilities and duties: that men are in truth and in fact members one of another.

The phases of despair represented in contemporary literature by writers who pointed the way to salvation through dogmas which only a generation before had been regarded as obscurantist and permanently outmoded, were distressing to those whose hope for human betterment grew from the desire that man should live in the

plenitude of his own powers, freed from reliance upon external supports which may crumble through the caprice of circumstance. Shaw's importance for his own time lay in his power to withstand the pressure of circumstance; in his ability to see clearly and his determination to speak coolly even when clarity and coolness were deemed inexpedient. By the test of expediency he was often 'wrong'—if, for example, it is deemed 'wrong' to call for sanity or justice towards a powerful enemy when one's own people are at war and in peril. By the same test, he was also 'wrong' to encourage a sceptical attitude towards doctors, since a patient may be benefited by faith in his doctor even if the doctor lacks curative skill. Yet, if truth is absolute and eternal, it must be a greater wrong to conceal truth than to utter it inopportunely. Whether Shaw's truths were always truth must remain an open question until time has judged between him and those who believed him to be, occasionally or always, in error. No one who views him fairly can doubt his honesty of purpose or suspect him of any conscious distortion of truth. He may on certain issues have been mistaken, even foolishly wrongheaded, but he was never false.

Chapter Two

BIOGRAPHICAL

FROM 1885 when, as a delegate of the Fabian Society he addressed the Industrial Remuneration Conference, down to his death sixty-five years later at the age of ninety-five, Bernard Shaw was more constantly in the public eye than any other person. Before he first appeared as a playwright in 1892 he had, as a journalist and platform orator, deliberately dramatized himself, setting up an apparently bumptious and aggressive character named G.B.S. as cover for the almost morbidly shy young man who was the real George Bernard Shaw. These two selves lived thenceforward side by side; the public self always obscuring the private self from all but his friends, and impressing upon the public mind for many years an image in a forbidding mask. Inasmuch as G.B.S. challenged current thought and doctrine in every direction, religionists and moralists supposed him to be (or wished to think him) a godless libertine; advocates of established political doctrines attacked him as an anarchist; doctors defended themselves against his scepticism by declaring him a supporter of quackery; believers in charity as a divine ordinance and social emollient saw him as mean and heartless. In truth, Shaw was ascetic, though not queasily repressed; religious in temper, though not sectarian or persecuting; scientific-minded in so far as he never ceased to inquire into the nature of things, though he fought against

superstitious acceptance of the conclusions of scientists; generous, though he detested 'charity' because it was much used to disguise the evil injustice of poverty.

It must not be imagined, however, that G.B.S. was a Mr. Hyde and Bernard Shaw a Dr. Jekyll, or that there was in his personality any trace of schizophrenia. As will be seen later, he claimed to be and undoubtedly was a normal person, appearances to the contrary being traceable to the widespread prevalence of abnormality in the modern world. The value of Shaw's normality lay in his ability to keep his head in times of crisis, a faculty which compelled him to write *Common Sense about the War* in 1914 and thereby incur intense hatred, and justified him in closing the Preface to *Buoyant Billions*, the last play published in his lifetime, with an apology for its brevity, ending in the rider: 'At least it will not rub into you the miseries and sins of the recent wars, nor even of the next one. History will make little of them; and the sooner we forget them the better. I wonder how many people really prefer bogus war news and police news to smiling comedy with some hope in it! I do not. When they begin I switch off the wireless.'

In response to numerous suggestions that he should write his life story Shaw insisted that he was not at all interesting biographically; that all his happenings had taken the form of books and plays, and that in them was to be found his entire story. This cannot be the whole truth, for the value of biography does not lie in its account of happenings but in its disclosure of personality. Though we know more about Shaw than of any other modern writer, we also know less—an appropriate paradox for the most paradoxical of writers. We know a great deal of his public self, a great deal of what he thought and believed. That part of his story is in

his books and plays, and there are many books about him and his works to amplify that part.¹ But the interior man remains hidden, except for such discontinuous glimpses as are vouchsafed in the relatively few of his private letters that have so far been published, especially in those written to Ellen Terry in the years (1892-1900) before they met (*Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence*, 1930). There he appears as a man with a heart as well as a brain, but it is characteristic that the heart is less apparent in that smaller section of the correspondence which belongs to the time following their meeting. Apart from this correspondence, there is very little overt evidence to throw light upon Shaw as a man of feeling, though he is understood to have been a devoted husband throughout the forty-five years of his married life. It is a striking fact that though Shaw lived his public life more publicly than anyone else and enjoyed the publicity, his private life was lived with modest privacy, unobserved by gossip-mongers and untouched by scandal.

Shaw's predilection for preaching and teaching was not without some ancestral source, for his great-great-grandmother Mary Markham was sister to William Markham, headmaster of Westminster School 1753-65 and Archbishop of York from 1777 to 1807. Like his great-great-nephew the archbishop also was denounced for preaching 'pernicious' doctrines. A baronet and other pillars of respectability and professional stability were closer at hand on the paternal side of the family, Sir Frederick Shaw being Recorder of Dublin and Bernard Shaw's own grandfather a Dublin solicitor.

¹ Since the above was written, Shaw's secretary, Blanche Patch, has published *30 Years with G.B.S.* (Gollancz, January 1951). She adds to our knowledge but not to our understanding of Shaw.

This social background gives substance to the point stressed by Shaw, namely that he had to overcome the handicap of being a 'downstart'. In other words, he had to recover from the family depression brought about by the circumstance that his parents had known better days before his father's shiftlessness and intemperance laid upon them the burden of genteel indigence.

George Carr Shaw, the playwright's father, was one of a family of thirteen supported by a widowed mother. His future seemed assured when he secured a sinecure post in the Courts of Justice (the Four Courts) in Dublin, but the office was abolished in 1850, the displaced official receiving the very mildly consolatory pension of £60 a year. This he sold in order to go into partnership as a corn merchant, neither he nor his partner knowing anything of that business. When he was over forty he married Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, the daughter of an Irish country gentleman who had made a fortune by pawnbroking before he bought an estate in County Dublin. Lucinda's mother died young, and when the widower married again she accepted George Carr Shaw's marriage proposal though he was twice her age. She refused to believe those who told her he was a drunkard, but learned the truth when she found the wardrobe stocked with empty bottles during their honeymoon in Liverpool.

Of the three children of the marriage, the youngest (and only boy) was George Bernard Shaw, born at 3 Upper Synge Street (now 33 Synge Street) Dublin on 26 July 1856. While a child he discovered the drunkenness of his father, and was so shocked that he declares he never believed in anything from that time onward. The father's drinking habits, the mother's disgust thereat, and the impoverished condition of the home,

threw the children very much upon their own resources, though the boy absorbed his father's sense of the ridiculous and love of anticlimax.

In girlhood Mrs. Shaw had made some progress under a well-known Dublin music master, and she turned back to music when her marriage was wrecked. From her, Bernard Shaw inherited not only his imaginative gifts but also his self-sufficingness. He says that she did not hate anybody nor love anybody; she was 'from the technical point of view of a modern welfare worker, neither a mother nor a wife, and could only be classed as a Bohemian anarchist with ladylike habits'.

By deciding to take singing lessons again she did far more than find compensation for an unsatisfactory husband; she also laid the foundations of her son's career. The teacher to whom she went to cultivate what Bernard Shaw described as a mezzo-soprano voice of extraordinary purity of tone was George John Vandaleur Lee, a Dublin concert organizer, conductor, and successful voice-trainer. Since Lee also took a sceptical view of specialists—whether they specialized in music or in medicine—and had certain personal habits (eating brown bread and sleeping with his window wide open, for example) which Bernard Shaw acquired, his influence on Mrs. Shaw's son ran beyond the sphere of music. But it was through music, nevertheless, that Lee unconsciously shaped the future of literature by providing the atmosphere from which Shaw absorbed music into his system, thus becoming qualified to act as a music critic in London and to graduate from that to dramatic criticism and so to play-writing. When, after the death of his brother, Lee became a member of the Shaw household at 1 Hatch Street, Dublin, practices and rehearsals day by day brought Bernard Shaw into a still more intimate

relationship with music, and a new world of delight opened when he began to be taken to the opera. By the time he started work in 1871 he had memorized operas, oratorios, and orchestral masterpieces by Beethoven, Gluck, Gounod, Handel, Mozart, Verdi, and others. Loving Mozart more than any, after his mother migrated to London (where Lee had settled before her) Shaw proceeded to teach himself to play the piano by using the score of the *Don Giovanni* overture as his first practice piece.

Meanwhile Bernard Shaw had become acquainted with some of the elements of formal education, first from Caroline Hill, his governess, and then from an uncle-in-law, the Reverend William George Carroll, Rector of St. Bride's, Dublin, who taught him Latin. At the age of eleven he went for a while to a Protestant non-sectarian institution, the Dublin Wesleyan Connexional School (afterwards called Wesley College). After an interlude at a private school in the country, he found himself in 1869 back in Dublin at the Central Model Boys' School. Most of the pupils there were the sons of Roman Catholic shopkeepers and tradesmen, a class despised by 'Protestant merchant gentlemen and feudal downstarts' on account both of their religion and of their presumed social inferiority. Shaw's eight months there filled him with such shame that he described it in 1949 as 'an episode in my boyhood formerly so repugnant to me, that for 80 years I never mentioned it to any mortal creature, not even to my wife. It was to me what the blacking warehouse was to Dickens.' His school life ended in 1871 after two years at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School.

On 1 November in that year he became a junior clerk in the offices of a firm of estate agents, Uniacke &

Townsend, in Molesworth Street, Dublin, starting at a wage of 18s. a month. By the end of about a year he had reached 40s. The cashier having left, Shaw gave such satisfaction as a stopgap successor that he was confirmed in the post at £1 a week. The rest of the office staff consisted mostly of premium paying university-educated youths serving an apprenticeship to the estate agency business. They and Shaw argued about religion (he had abandoned orthodox Protestant Christianity in boyhood) and he devoted office time to the attempt to teach them to sing arias from the operas.

His employers testified that 'he was a young man of great business capacity, strict accuracy, and thoroughly reliable and trustworthy', who always did accurately and well whatever was given him to do. Through four and a half years, therefore, it seemed very probable that George Bernard Shaw would develop into a highly efficient and blameless, but otherwise unremarkable, estate agents' managing clerk. But the Life Force extended a saving hand and prodded Charles Townsend into protesting against his young cashier's addiction to argument, and he extracted from Shaw a hesitant promise to refrain from religious controversy in office hours. Having given the undertaking, Shaw found himself in trouble with his own conscience, which resented this curtailment of its liberty. If office life was incompatible with freedom of speech, then, Shaw decided, he must turn his back on offices. He therefore resigned, and after a brief interval decided to leave his father, with whom he had been in lodgings at 61 Harcourt Street, Dublin, since Mrs. Shaw had departed from Ireland with her daughters in 1872.

In April 1876 Bernard Shaw joined his mother and his sister Lucy at 13 Victoria Grove (now Netherton

Grove), Fulham Road, London. His elder sister Agnes had died shortly before. Vandaleur Lee was by this time a prosperous teacher of singing in Park Lane, having forsaken his own unique and genuine method of voice training for the fashionable bogus method employed by the 'professors' whose sworn enemy he had been formerly. This appeared to Mrs. Shaw as a treacherous descent into charlatanism, and she accordingly went her own way as a teacher, while Lucy Shaw endeavoured to supplement her mother's earnings by concert singing. The father contributed £1 a week, and whenever they failed to make ends meet they drew upon 'a maternal inheritance of £4000 over which my mother had a power of appointment, and which therefore could be realised bit by bit as her three children came of age. . .'. So, 'we managed to keep going somehow'.

Although Shaw had had no intention of taking any further commercial employment, and began soon to write novels, he was induced to accept the post of Way-Leave Manager to the Edison Telephone Company in November 1879. The next seven and a half months brought him into touch with many sorts of people whom he endeavoured to persuade to give facilities for the erection of telephone posts and for the passage of cables, but when the amalgamated Edison-Bell Company was formed in July 1880 he left commerce for ever, describing it as 'this sin against my nature'.

Shaw started to scribble stories and other pieces before he was ten and submitted various manuscripts to periodicals, but nothing had been published until 3 April 1875 when *Public Opinion* printed a letter from Dublin in which he lodged a reasoned objection to the revivalist methods of the American Evangelical missionaries Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey. Nine years

of authorship in London, from 1876 to 1885, brought him a total of £6. For an article on Christian Names in G. R. Sims's paper, *One and All*, he received 15s.; for a set of verses 5s.; and for an essay on patent medicines, commissioned by a solicitor friend, £5. After leaving the Edison Company he earned £2 or so for counting votes at a Leyton election. This was the last item of earned income until he became a book reviewer in 1885.

His first novel, *Immaturity* (1879) was followed by four others, *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882), *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). All were rejected by the publishers to whom he submitted them, although *An Unsocial Socialist* and *Cashel Byron's Profession* were serialized in a Socialist journal *To-day* in 1884 and 1885-6 respectively, and *The Irrational Knot* and *Love Among the Artists* in 1885-7 and 1887-8 in *Our Corner*, a publication controlled by Mrs. Annie Besant, the theosophist and advocate of Indian independence, whom Shaw converted to Fabian Socialism. These serials brought no profit to the author.

In 1879 Shaw joined the Zetetical Society, which adopted that name in its dictionary sense of 'proceeding by inquiry' and debated religious and scientific questions, basing itself upon the principles of John Stuart Mill's *Essay on Liberty* published in 1859. At the first meeting he attended Shaw addressed an unfamiliar audience for the first time in his life. He was agonizingly nervous and forgot the main points on which he had intended to speak. He therefore resolved to practise public speaking at every possible opportunity until he had entirely overcome his nervousness and was able to marshal his arguments without floundering. As the outcome of this

resolve, which led him to address innumerable outdoor and indoor public meetings, he became an unsurpassed if not unequalled orator.

Shaw was converted to the economic doctrines of Socialism by Henry George, the American author of *Progress and Poverty*, whom he heard at a meeting in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, in the City of London, in September 1884. From *Progress and Poverty* he went on to Karl Marx, reading *Das Kapital* in a French edition.

In the same month he took a further momentous step by joining the Fabian Society. Though the Fabians became associated in later years with 'the inevitability of gradualness' as opposed to revolutionary violence, and succeeded in making Socialism 'constitutional, practical, and respectable', Shaw reminded the Society in 1892 that it 'was warlike in its origin: it came into existence through a schism in an earlier society for the peaceful regeneration of the race by the cultivation of perfection of individual character. Certain members of that circle, modestly feeling that the revolution would have to wait an unreasonably long time if postponed until they personally had attained perfection, set up the banner of Socialism militant. . . . That was how the Fabian [Society] began; and although the same practical vein which had led its founders to insist on an active policy afterwards made them the most resolute opponents of Insurrectionism, the Constitutionalism which now distinguishes us was . . . unheard of at the Fabian meetings in 1884 and 1885. . . .'

The transformation of the Fabian Society was the joint achievement of Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, who had first met at a Zetetical Society debate and became lifelong friends. Webb was then an upper-division civil

servant with an intimate knowledge of administration, a phenomenal memory, and an astoundingly orderly mind. In partnership with his wife Beatrice Webb he undertook what became by far the most productive course of social investigation ever conducted by two people, their special field being the Poor Law and Local Government organization. Shaw described Webb as the ablest man in England, and added: 'Quite the wisest thing I ever did was to force my friendship on him and to keep it; for from that time I was not merely a futile Shaw but a committee of Webb and Shaw. . . . The difference between Shaw with Webb's brains, knowledge, and official experience and Shaw by himself was enormous. But as I was and am an incorrigible histrionic mountebank, and Webb was the simplest of geniuses, I was often in the centre of the stage whilst he was invisible in the prompter's box.' They were suitably cast in these very different parts, for it is more than likely that without Shaw to catch the eye and ear and imagination (and sometimes, at least, the heart) of the public, the Webbs' researches would have made less stir.

Round about the same time Shaw started another life-long friendship, and one which, generations hence, may appear to have been even more important than the Shaw-Webb partnership. William Archer never became as prominent a public figure as Webb. He was a dramatic critic, the earliest translator of Ibsen's plays, and towards the end of his life the author of a popular melodrama *The Green Goddess*. Shaw says that Archer was attracted to him as to 'a person free from certain superstitions that had been oppressive to him; but I interested him still more by being so laughably free, not only from superstitions recognized by him as such, but from many conventions which he had never dreamt of challenging

that I appealed irresistibly to him as an incarnate joke'. Finding Shaw in need and recognizing his exceptional literary ability, Archer deputed to him part of his own journalistic work for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The World* until both papers in turn 'accepted the deputy as a principal'. In that way Shaw became book reviewer to the former from May 1885 to August 1888 and art critic to the latter from February 1886 to May 1889. The work thus placed in his way by Archer established Shaw in London journalism, and impecuniosity was behind him for ever.

When *The Star*, a London evening newspaper, was founded by T. P. O'Connor in 1885 Shaw was engaged as a leader-writer. His views on public affairs were immediately found unsuitable for a Liberal paper and he was switched to music criticism, writing under the pseudonym Corno di Bassetto until May 1890, when he went back to *The World* as music critic until August 1894. Shaw's last regular post in journalism was as theatre critic on the *Saturday Review* from January 1895 to May 1898, his sequence of articles during those years making the initials G.B.S. famous and adding a composite masterpiece to English criticism.

The earliest non-fictional volume by Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, came out in 1891. In the following year Archer's friendship began to produce its most valuable fruit when Shaw's first play *Widowers' Houses* was performed by the Independent Theatre Society. Seven years earlier Archer had proposed that Shaw and he should collaborate on a play and suggested subject matter for it. The project was shelved, for Shaw developed the theme in a manner unanticipated by Archer, and the piece did not reach completion until the Independent Theatre Society was in need of a play

in 1892, and it then bore no resemblance to anything Archer had imagined.

In 1897 Shaw was elected to the only public office he ever held, as a member of the St. Pancras Vestry. The vestries were bodies charged with municipal duties now carried out by their successors the borough councils, and when St. Pancras was constituted a borough in 1900 Shaw became a councillor until 1903. The direct literary product of this experience was a pamphlet *The Common Sense of Municipal Trading* published in 1904, but there are also evidences in several of the plays. As a vestryman and councillor Shaw served on the Health, Parliamentary, Lighting, Housing, and Drainage committees. He retired in 1903 and stood unsuccessfully for South St. Pancras at the London County Council election in the next year. (He was made the first Honorary Freeman of the Metropolitan Borough of Saint Pancras in 1946, and the local authority there organized the first memorial celebration after his death in 1950.)

* At a Fabian Society house-party in August 1896 Bernard Shaw met Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a wealthy woman of his own age and Irish on her father's side. They were immediately attracted to one another, but Shaw was unwilling to contemplate marriage in view of his own meagre income. *Arms and the Man*, produced in London and New York in 1894, had no such success as to justify high hopes of his future as a playwright; but three years later the American actor-manager Richard Mansfield had what would now be called a smash-hit with *The Devil's Disciple* in New York. Having received £2,000 from this, Shaw's marriage prospects brightened, though it was not until overwork and a septic foot caused a complete breakdown of his health in 1898 and brought Miss Payne-Townshend hurrying from abroad to nurse

him that they decided to marry—as they did at the West Strand Registrar's Office on 1 June 1898.

Shaw had been lodging in near-squalor for some years at 29 Fitzroy Square (between Tottenham Court Road and Great Portland Street), but after the marriage he moved to his wife's flat at 10 Adelphi Terrace, which remained their London address until The Adelphi was about to be demolished in 1928 and they moved to 4 Whitehall Court. After occupying country homes in various parts they settled in 1906 at Ayot St. Lawrence, near Welwyn, in Hertfordshire.

Success came to Shaw in the English theatre during the repertory season conducted at the Court Theatre, London, by J. E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker 1904-7. From that time onward the story of Shaw's life is the story of his plays, and nothing beyond a few dates and bare facts is required to round off the present chapter.

Shaw's father died on 19 April 1885 but his mother lived until 19 February 1913. Despite Vandaleur Lee's defection from artistic integrity when he succumbed to the lure of money in London, Shaw paid him a handsome and merited tribute: 'He not only made my mother sing by a method that preserved her voice perfectly until her death at over eighty but gave her a Cause and a Creed to live for.' Lucy, Shaw's sister, married, but separated from her husband, divorcing him years afterwards when she learned that at the time of their marriage 'there had been another lady in the case'. Having freed herself legally she then, finding that he was lonely, 'entertained him daily until his death'. In 1920, Shaw recorded, 'when she and I were in our sixties, I called on her one sunny afternoon and found her in bed, alone. She told me she was dying, and presently did actually die whilst she held my hand. . . . Her heart if she had

one, was quite unbreakable, and the hearts she broke, not at all lethally by the way, were innumerable.'

The 1925 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Shaw, who directed that the money (some £8,000) be used to establish an Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation, which began by sponsoring English translations of Strindberg's plays.

Until his wife induced him in later years to accompany her on long voyages, Shaw was no traveller. 'One place is very much like another', he said. As a music critic he visited Bayreuth, but his first journey farther afield was in 1931, when he celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday in Moscow and held a long conversation with Stalin. In 1931-2 he and his wife visited South Africa. While Mrs. Shaw was recovering there (at Knysna, in Cape Province) from injuries received in a motor accident due to Shaw's having mistaken the accelerator for the brake in an unfamiliar make of car, he wrote *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*. They started on a world tour in December 1932, and when visiting the United States for the first time Shaw delivered an address on *The Future of Political Science in America* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on 11 April 1933. A visit to New Zealand in 1934 was followed by a second tour to South Africa in the following year and a Pacific cruise in 1936. On 12 September 1943 Mrs. Shaw died.

A few weeks after his ninety-fifth birthday Bernard Shaw fell while working in his garden at Ayot St. Lawrence and fractured his thigh. He appeared to respond satisfactorily to surgical treatment in Luton Hospital for this and for an internal derangement, and returned home after a short interval. Towards the end

of October it became apparent that his life was ending. He died peacefully on Thursday 2 November 1950 (aged ninety-five and three weeks), leaving £367,000, from which was to be financed an inquiry into the practical advantages of an enlarged English alphabet providing a separate symbol for every vowel sound; the ultimate residue of his fortune, after provision for personal legacies, to be equally divided between the British Museum (in gratitude to the Reading Room, which he used constantly as a young man), the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and the National Gallery of Ireland.

The Public Trustee was instructed in Shaw's will that the body was to be cremated and the ashes mixed inseparably with those of his wife. In that condition they were to be 'inurned or scattered in the garden of the house in Ayot St. Lawrence where we lived together for 35 years, unless some other disposal of them should be in the opinion of my trustee more eligible. Personally I prefer the garden to the cloister. As my religious convictions and scientific views cannot at present be more specifically defined than as those of a believer in creative evolution, I desire that no public monument or work of art or inscription or sermon or ritual service commemorating me shall suggest that I accepted the tenets peculiar to any established Church or denomination nor take the form of a cross or any other instrument of torture or symbol of blood sacrifice.'

The Trustee said in a public statement that the question of interment in Westminster Abbey had been considered, but it was thought that if ecclesiastical authorities made any move to allow the burial of Shaw's ashes in any religious national shrine 'the feelings of Churchmen would be offended'. So the ashes of Bernard and Charlotte Shaw rest in the Ayot St. Lawrence garden as

he wished; but one may imagine that in his spiritual form Shaw's eyes twinkled ironically at the assurance that his remains would there give offence to none and that all who lie in Westminster Abbey are of blameless dust.

Chapter Three

FICTION AND CRITICISM

ANYONE setting out to make a study of modern curiosities of literature could find a store of material in Bernard Shaw's five novels (*Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love Among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession*, *An Unsocial Socialist*). Custom, habit, fashion, accident, and the imitative faculty have been as often responsible for the shaping of literary history as the originating genius of authors has been. When Shaw reached London in 1876 with the itch to write, the literary form in vogue was the novel. Shaw therefore started to write novels; not in the dilettante spirit that has moved thousands of young people to say 'I want to write a novel', but with solemn painstaking industry. By the sheer physical labour of putting down one word after another, so many words each day, Shaw achieved in the five years from 1879 to 1883 the five novels which fill more than sixteen hundred solidly-printed pages in the Collected Edition of his works. The result is impressive. As impressive—and as inappropriate—as five epic poems by Shakespeare would have been if epic poetry had been in vogue when he reached London in the 1580s.

If some London commercial publisher had accepted the novels and sold just enough copies to enable the author to scrape a bare living from the proceeds, would Shaw's position in English literature have become something like George Gissing's? There is in Shaw's novels

a strain of Gissingesque earnest competence and, in parts of *Immaturity* at least, a certain Gissingesque thickness of atmosphere. Some drudging success as a novelist could have fixed those qualities in Shaw's writing and could in the end have led him to produce novels in which the characters were defeated by life, as they are in Gissing's; though account must also be taken of the counter-strain of humorous iconoclasm in Shaw which might in any circumstances have led him, as it did in actual fact, into the orbit of Samuel Butler, rather than into that of Gissing. In later years Shaw was disposed to emphasize his debt to Butler, but though Butler's *Erewhon* was published four years before Bernard Shaw left Dublin, it is perfectly clear from the internal evidence provided by *Immaturity* that Shaw's particular vision of the world and his way of thinking were innate, not acquired from any outside source. He was to find in Butler, subsequently, a strong mental attraction, though some temperamental repulsion also, and they should be regarded as independent planets moving along corresponding paths, rather than as planet and satellite.

By 1883 Shaw was satisfied that as a novelist he had failed—or at any rate that he could not hope to make a living by writing novels. His dilemma, then, was as the young Shakespeare's might have been if the Elizabethan theatre managers had rejected his first five plays. Nothing but accident—or fate or providence—preserved Shaw for literature: the accident of becoming acquainted with William Archer, through whom he was to be a journalist and critic, ultimately a theatre critic, and in embryo a playwright.

Publishers' readers in the 1880s complained that the novels Shaw submitted were deficient in plot. To twentieth-century readers they seem to be stifled by

plot, a kind of glutinous element in which the characters flounder out of their depth and only occasionally rise to the surface for a gasp of air. Charles Morgan's history of *The House of Macmillan* (1943) quotes from the report on *Immaturity* by their reader (possibly John Morley, editor of the English Men of Letters series and afterwards the statesman who became Viscount Morley): '... it has a certain quality about it—not exactly of an attractive kind, but still not common. It is the work of a humourist and a realist, crossed, however, by veins of merely literary discussion. There is a piquant oddity about the situations now and then; and the characters are certainly not drawn after the conventional patterns of fiction. . . . It is undoubtedly clever, but most readers would find it dry, unattractive, and too devoid of any sort of emotion. And then it is very long.' The book was, of course, rejected; but Shaw submitted his next novel, *The Irrational Knot*, to the same publishers. The reader (unnamed) reported that it was 'clearly the work of a man with a certain originality and courage of mind', though he found the thought of the book 'all wrong . . . odd, perverse and crude'. 'It is the work of a man writing about life, when he knows nothing of it. . . . There is too much of adultery and the like matters.'

Unless a present-day reader assumes that publishers in the 1880s should have been endowed with second sight, there is no ground for complaint against these verdicts. What was said was reasonable and fair by any standard. Where the verdicts differ from those we might give, the difference is one of taste, a factor variable from generation to generation. If manuscripts of this character were to be submitted to a publisher nowadays, his reader would remark upon the wastefully unneces-

sary complexity of plot and the long stretches of narrative written in so precise a style that the prose is often on the edge of pomposity. He would, still, remark upon a certain originality and audacity of approach to subjects upon which the majority have conventional opinions that have gone unchanged for generations. He would hardly notice any stress upon adultery in *The Irrational Knot*, but if he did he would point out the entire absence of sensuality in the novelist's treatment. And he would almost certainly advise against publication, just as the Macmillan readers did. There are gems—a few precious, the rest semi-precious—in the five Shaw novels, but they are embedded in masses of narrative clay. Clay is a respectable substance and much may be made of it. Shaw does make something of it in these five respectable novels, but not enough. He was no clay-smith, nor even a potter; the substance was not shapeable by those hands, it merely clogged the hands and all but clotted the brain that controlled them.

Shaw could no more have become a first-rate novelist than Shakespeare could have become a first-rate epic poet. Shakespeare, however, had one great preliminary advantage over Shaw. The right medium for him was already in being when Shakespeare got to London; blank-verse drama was at hand as an instrument waiting to be taken up by a master. When Shaw arrived in London no forerunner such as Shakespeare had in Marlowe awaited him. None of Ibsen's social dramas had yet been written, much less translated; and of the two English playwrights—Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones—who are sometimes thought of as, in however limited a way, Shaw's precursors, neither was known until several years after 1876. T. W. Robertson had died five years before; but his naturalistic comedies,

which can be seen in distant retrospect as the beginnings of a new epoch in the theatre, had made no revolutionary impression at that time. The truth is, therefore, that in 1876 English drama was still in the doldrums which had prevailed since Goldsmith's and Sheridan's plays appeared in the 1760-70s.

So, however unsuitable a form the novel might be for Shaw, no other creative prose medium suggested itself at that time to a young man who intended to live by writing.

While it is true that Shaw's novels, considered aesthetically, are failures, they are by no means unreadable; while for students of his works they have a special interest, inasmuch as the author's originality of outlook and the first-handness of his thinking show in high relief against as much as he could command of formal conventional structure in the novels. Though a detailed consideration of the five novels is worth making, a separate book of some length would be needed for a critical examination of the characters and the stories. For the present purpose it is enough to look at some of their representative features as these are displayed in *Immaturity*, which, belying its title, is a remarkably competent and sustained work for a young man of twenty-two and is in most respects the best of the five.

The recurrent near-pomposity of style referred to above was afterwards explained by Shaw as his re-importation to England of the eighteenth-century Augustan English which had been preserved in Dublin. Such phrases as 'the protection of the edifice from conflagration by smokers' and 'free from the demoralizing influence of pecuniary embarrassment' (*Immaturity*, Book I, chapters VII and VIII) are infrequent, and the stateliness of the prose in Shaw's novels impresses much

more often than its occasional obesity amuses. In the Preface to *Immaturity*, written more than forty years after the novel, Shaw says: 'I can guarantee the propriety of my early style. It was the last thing in correctness. I have never aimed at style in my life: style is a sort of melody that comes into my sentences by itself.' He goes on to say that he did impose one stylistic condition upon himself in early days: 'I resolved that I would write nothing that should not be intelligible to a foreigner with a dictionary, like the French of Voltaire; and I therefore avoided idiom. (Later on I came to seek idiom as being the most highly vitalized form of language.)' He points out, moreover, that *Immaturity* was written before he first opened his mouth in public and started on his career as an orator. The prose of *Immaturity* is written literary prose; the prose of the plays spoken idiomatic prose. The trend towards increase of dialogue and limitation of narrative can be seen from a comparison of *Immaturity* and *An Unsocial Socialist*, the last of the novels; and in the latter such Augustan relics as 'they allayed their internal discomfort by a slender meal of biscuits' and 'rising ruefully to a sitting posture' (ch. VII) are rarer.

Shaw's women characters were, from the first, specimens of the New Woman, who does not appear in social history until some years after Harriet Russell was created in *Immaturity*. One of the first things the hero, Robert Smith, notices about her is that she walks with 'the grace of a lioness', whereas he was 'accustomed to see women walk like parrots'. Mary Sutherland in *Love Among the Artists* is rebuked by her womenfolk for her unladylike stride, which irritates Colonel Beatty into exclaiming that she walks like a horse instead of (as he declares a woman should) like a cow. Not since

Charlotte Brontë made the revolutionary change of introducing the plain governess as the heroine of fiction had so much emphasis been laid upon unromantic physical characteristics in young women as by Shaw—with the difference that while for Charlotte Brontë it was a psychological compensation, in Shaw's novels it was an early blow in his campaign against romanticism. Harriet Russell, his first heroine, is not uncomely, yet Smith was nevertheless 'awed by the impression of power which he received from her fine strong hands, and firm jaw'. Mary Sutherland—short sighted, with a boldly curved 'salient nose' and chin—is thought by some to be strikingly handsome, by the rest strikingly ugly. When it suited Shaw's purpose to have a pleasant-looking young woman for heroine the superficiality of his description suggests that a pretty face held little interest for him. He says of Mary Sutherland that she would perhaps have forgiven those who thought her ugly 'for the sake of the implied admission that she was at least not commonplace'.

Outspokenness and resolute character were of more account to Shaw than the social make-believe that passed for natural womanliness in nineteenth-century English Society. In English fiction of that century a proposal of marriage might be romantic, or pathetic, or comic. The first proposal scene in Shaw's works, between Cyril Scott and Harriet Russell (III, I and IV), is none of these. She is attracted to him and at length they marry successfully, but though she is not cold blooded or heartless she does not for a moment allow emotion to overbear prudence and sense. She answers at first: 'I have seen a great deal of marriage; and I would rather remain as I am!' Later: 'There are many other things besides liking or disliking to be considered in marriage.' Her reluc-

tance to marry Scott is in part because he is well connected socially, whereas she is a self-supporting dress-maker. Her father had brought her up in an atheistic atmosphere, and when she consents to become Scott's wife she lays down two conditions: '. . . first, that our marriage is not to be a religious ceremony. . . . Second: that . . . you will not expect me to behave badly to such of my friends as are not ladies nor gentlemen.' The acceptance scene closes with one of those pieces of wry comedy which were to become the famous Shavian device of anti-climax. Immediately before she agreed, 'Seeing that he was only waiting for her assent to seize her in his arms and kiss her, she moved her chair a few inches back with a feeling approaching to aversion. It seemed to her bad enough to become a man's property, without being pounced upon the instant the bargain was concluded.' When he kissed and put his arm around her, she 'endured it for more than half a minute. Then she gently disengaged herself, and said, softening the request by speaking in her sweetest tone, "Stop. Sit down. Marriage is a very serious thing. I cant play with you now."' No doubt it was such passages as these that caused Macmillans' reader to say that Shaw knew nothing of life. The view that might now be taken is that Shaw at twenty-three had a preternatural knowledge of what life was to be like in the next generation; or, alternatively, that he took a leading part in making life in his own image of it.

Shaw was almost constantly preoccupied with the subject of marriage throughout his career as a writer. Since his own marriage was evidently successful—seemingly without reliance upon romance or passion—this preoccupation must have derived from the failure of his parents' marriage, for it was obviously rooted

in an experience of the consequences of unsuitable marriage. A further, impersonal, cause lay in his strong persuasion that each new generation must determine to improve upon the one before, and that sensible marriage between fit and sensible men and women was the best broad foundation for the improvement of the race. That he did not hold humdrum sensibleness to be the highest factor, but only the norm for general guidance, is shown by several of his plays, notably *Man and Superman*, where the Life Force takes a hand in bringing together an exceptional pair. In his first novel the unsuccessful marriage of the painter, Vesey, provides a cautionary tale (II, x).

Immaturity is a compendium of the matters which interested Shaw most at the outset of his literary career. The account (I, III) of Smith's Christmas morning visit to a mission house in Shepherd's Market, Piccadilly, throws some light upon the author's discontent with the contemporary presentation of religion. Smith found the tract he was handed 'neither credible, Christian, nor interesting'; and he drew no spiritual benefit from a long prayer in the course of which a young man 'suggested such modifications of the laws of nature as would bring the arrangement of the universe into conformity with his own tenets. When he was done, several others delivered addresses; but they lacked variety, as the speakers were all very ignorant.' Comments on music and paintings (both professional and amateur) arise from Smith's evenings at Covent Garden and the old Alhambra in Leicester Square and his visits to Mr. Grosvenor's gatherings at Perspective, Richmond; while even a man's casual whistle of surprise is noted as having 'descended a major ninth before it ceased' (III, VI). A grim episode (II, VII) in Brompton

Cemetery foreshadows Shaw's later practical concern with sanitary matters. More surprising are the ladies' fashion items which creep now and again into the novels: e.g. the description of Isabella Woodward's dress, hat, boots, and gloves (III, viii).

Between 1885 and 1931 Shaw wrote the dozen fictional pieces first gathered together as *Short Stories* in the Collected Edition, and afterwards reissued in the Standard Edition as part of the volume containing *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932). *Short Stories* includes a dialogue fragment left over from *Back to Methuselah*, 'The Domesticity of Franklyn Barnabas', and unremarkable except for the character called Immenso Champernoon, a stage caricature of G. K. Chesterton.

While the short stories may hold a curious interest for Shaw students, none but the *Black Girl* is important in itself. This Voltairean invention was embellished with wood-engravings by John Farleigh, one or more of the most vigorous being based upon drawings made by Shaw himself in the course of a lively correspondence with the artist. Written while the author was in South Africa in 1932, the fable describes the experiences of a comely young convert who interprets literally the answer made by a woman missionary to the question 'Where is God?' '“He has said ‘Seek and ye shall find me’” said the missionary.' Having set out with the Bible and a knobkerry the Black Girl encounters first the God of Noah, then the God of Job. Revolted by the demand of the one for blood-sacrifice and by the inability of the other to explain why he put so much evil and ugliness into the world, she attacks each in turn with her knobkerry, failing to hit either, but finding after each

attempt that a portion of her Bible has disappeared in dust. Next, Ecclesiastes tells her that God is not with him and that she should do all the work that comes to her as well as she can while she can, 'and so fill up with use and honor the days that remain to you'. From him she learns 'that to know God is to be God'. The prophet Micah does little but roar and cause her to run until she meets a bespectacled elder seated on a log. No name is given to him, but he is undoubtedly intended to represent the Soviet scientist Pavlov. He speaks of God as an unnecessary and discarded hypothesis and describes his experiments on dogs to demonstrate the working of conditioned reflexes. The Black Girl is not impressed, except by his cruelty and stupidity, and she proceeds by a painless and instantaneous method to activate his own reflexes.

When she encounters Jesus, he explains that God is within and that heaven is love, but this does not satisfy her. She wants to know *what* God is, and shrinks from love as a devouring tyranny: '. . . our souls need solitude as much as our bodies need love!' After a succession of other conversations—with Mahomet and with Churchmen of several denominations and an argumentative company of men and women called the Caravan of the Curious—the Black Girl comes to 'a very amateurish garden' which is being cultivated by a wizened old man whom we may name Voltaire. He warns her that if God revealed Himself she might share the fate of Semele, who was consumed when Jupiter granted her wish and appeared to her in 'the full panoply of his divinity'. 'God is at your elbow. . . . Make a little garden for yourself: dig and plant and weed and prune; and be content if He jogs your elbow when you are gardening unskilfully, and blesses you when you are

gardening well. . . . For we shall never be able to bear His full presence until we have fulfilled all His purposes and become gods ourselves. . . . Therefore come in and help to cultivate this garden to His glory. The rest you had better leave to Him.' So the Black Girl takes to working in the old man's garden, until they capture a reluctant red-haired Irishman (depicted in the likeness of Shaw himself) whom she marries and by whom she has 'charmingly coffee-colored children'. What with them and the garden and mending she rarely thinks further about searching for God. When she does, it strikes her as peculiar that she should ever have regarded herself as the centre of the universe or been taught by the missionary to consider God as 'somebody who had nothing better to do than to watch everything she did and worry Himself about her salvation'.

In a section added by way of epilogue to the Black Girl's story, Shaw discourses on the use and abuse of the Bible, seeing in it a great deal that is obsolete, but also much that is valuable as a record of how the idea of God developed from notions of savage idolatry to the concept of 'the incorporeal word that never becomes flesh'. At that point, Shaw believed, modern science and philosophy took up the problem and brought in such ideas as are embodied in, for example, his own theory of the Life Force in *Man and Superman* and elsewhere, leading up to the doctrine of Creative Evolution put forward in *Back to Methuselah* as a religion for the twentieth century.

The book reviews with which Shaw began his career as a journalist in 1885 at the age of twenty-nine have not been reprinted from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, nor have the art criticisms contributed to *The World* from 1886

to 1889. The volume issued in 1937 as *London Music in 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto* (later known as *Bernard Shaw*), contains articles written for *The Star*; the three volumes (1931) of *Music in London 1890-94*, the weekly criticisms for *The World*; and the three volumes (1931) entitled *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, the weekly contributions to the *Saturday Review* from January 1895 to May 1898. At that date he ceased regular journalism.

From the first, Bernard Shaw's distinctive characteristic as a critic was that he wrote with knowledge, with devotion, and with zest. Many later critics have been knowledgeable, but in none has the knowledge seemed so abundant and mature, so little 'learned up' for the occasion. The richness and maturity of Shaw's knowledge is such that it passes from the region of information into that of wisdom; he would not—he certainly would not—have claimed to be (nor allowed himself to be called) a scholar. A scholar's knowledge may be no more than academic; but Shaw possessed the artist's instinctive knowledge which raises him from the level of a scholar who knows only what he has learned to that of a mage who knows whatever is knowable. It is true that, as has been said in the preceding chapter, Shaw when young was steeped in an atmosphere of music. It is true also that the knowledge perceptible to the reader (though not obtrusively displayed) in the music criticisms goes far beyond what could have been acquired from George John Vandaleur Lee and his circle. Any skilled journalist is able to make a display of knowledge, even when he does not possess it; it is a necessary part of his job to illude the public in that respect. What distinguished Shaw from the common run of journalist-critics was that his store contained

a vast deal more than was ever displayed in the shop windows. This is so in relation not only to the music criticisms but equally to the theatre criticisms, a field in which he had had no special advantages in boyhood or after. It is worth while stressing Shaw's possession of funds of knowledge not consciously acquired, for it is a fact that shows up the stupidity of those who seek a ghost author of Shakespeare's plays on the ground that Shakespeare could not have been educated enough to write them himself. An artist's qualification for being an artist is that he *knows* more than he 'knows'.

The wonder of Shaw's music criticisms is that although they are studded with the names of forgotten executants whose singing and playing made little or no impression beyond the hour, there is hardly a page which is not interesting to a present-day reader, even to a non-musical reader. Though there is much practical advice about technique, tempo, interpretation, etc. (in all of which Shaw avoided the jargon of programme annotators and the now-called musicologists), there is also plentiful illuminating discussion of larger matters from which it is possible for the not already instructed to learn why certain operatic and orchestral works are ranked as masterpieces and others as commonplace achievements. Shaw's catholicity of judgement is shown by his readiness to find virtue not only in the great works of the great masters but also, according to the nature of their kind, in good specimens of the musical-comedy type of light opera; in the turns of Marie Lloyd, Lottie Collins, and other music-hall performers; in ballet at the Alhambra and the Empire (with suggestions for the improvement of ballet and the setting up of a national school such as were to be implemented many years later by the Sadlers Wells Company which

achieved world fame). He gives an excellent account (Vol. III, pp. 223-7) of Yvette Guilbert's first appearance in London, starting with the uncompromising sentence 'Another great artist has come' and proceeding to a vividly dramatic account of her singing of the macabre 'La Pierreuse'. Equally vivid is his description of Calvé as Carmen (III, 238-40). His own personal saturation in the subjects about which he was writing is indicated by (for example) the comparison made in his article dated 4 June 1890 of a Madame Gerster's singing at Covent Garden that week with her performance of the same part fourteen years before—in 1877, the year after he reached London and when he must have heard her from the gallery. Reminiscences keep breaking-in in a fascinating way, as when, to account for the failure of the funeral march in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony to impress him suitably, he recalls farcical episodes at the many family funerals he had to attend as a boy in Ireland (III, 160-3). The invigoration which these articles provide comes in almost equal parts from Shaw's enthusiasms and sympathies and from his prejudices and antipathies. Among his impassioned dislikings, nineteenth-century oratorios stood high: 'These works are mostly written by men who are or have been church organists; and church organists are, as a class, more utterly void of religious reverence than any other body of men in the world' (II, 124-5). Shaw's opinion at that time, 1892, was shared by more than a few devout Churchmen, whose combined efforts at length raised English Church music to its present level.

The high ethical standard of critical integrity which Shaw always set led him to oppose the project to form a critics' club mentioned in his music article on 3 September 1890. He commented: '. . . a critic should

not belong to any club at all. He should not know anybody: his hand should be against every man and every man's hand against his.' He went on to allude to the many assaults upon a critic's honesty which may come from 'social or clubable' sources. He also presented in the same article a manifesto of his own creed as a critic: 'It is the capacity for making good or bad art a personal matter that makes a man a critic . . . when people do less than their best, and do that less at once badly and self-complacently, I hate them, loathe them, detest them, long to tear them limb from limb and strew them in gobbets about the stage or platform. . . . In the same way, really fine artists inspire me with the warmest personal regard. . . . When my critical mood is at its height, personal feeling is not the word: it is passion: the passion for artistic perfection—for the noblest beauty of sound, sight, and action—that rages in me . . .'

(I, 53-5).

A perhaps disproportionate amount of space has here been given to Shaw's music criticisms at the expense of his theatre articles. Intentionally so, for the latter have the greater intrinsic interest and are, for that reason, widely known and long since firmly established among the classics of English criticism. However highly Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Lamb, William Archer, C. E. Montague, or any others may be rated as dramatic critics, none can fairly be claimed as Bernard Shaw's peer. Even if on occasion their standard was equal to his, none of them wrote regularly about the theatre for so long a period (three years and four months), and none wrote with so genuine an air of knowing from A to Z what he was talking about or so complete a convic-

tion that it was worth talking about. None but Shaw, that is to say, was driven by the critical passion which makes good art a source of intense pleasure and bad art a matter of distress.

The attraction of *Our Theatres in the Nineties* is so irresistible to any lover of the theatre that there can be no middle way between a summary indication of the main contents of the volumes and full and prolonged discussion. The former course must be chosen here. Among the general subjects frequently introduced are, of course, Acting, Actors and Acting, Critics and Criticism; and Censorship, Diction, Englishmen, Novels, the Public, Society and Social questions, Theatres (architecture, finance, function, etc.), Women. The authors who claim most of Shaw's attention are Dickens, Sydney Grundy, Ibsen, Henry Arthur Jones, Pinero, T. W. Robertson, Sardou, Shakespeare, Wagner, Oscar Wilde. Inevitably, scores of individual actors and actresses are mentioned, principally George Alexander, Lena Ashwell, the Bancrofts, Wilson Barrett, Sarah Bernhardt, Arthur Bouchier, the Brouchs, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Eleanora Duse, Forbes Robertson, John Hare, Martin Harvey, Charles Hawtrey, Henry Irving, H. B. Irving, the Kendals, Julia Neilson, Ada Rehan, Réjane, William Terris, Ellen Terry, Fred Terry, Marion Terry, Beerbohm Tree and his wife, Irene and Violet Vanbrugh, Lewis Waller, Geneviève Ward, James Welch, Charles Wyndham. These volumes provide the best possible conspectus of English plays, players, and productions during the period they cover. If any one topic is more persistent than the rest it is Shaw's conviction that Irving was wasting his great talent and also that of his leading lady, Ellen Terry, upon sensational melodramas

and mutilated Shakespeare while important contemporary plays (particularly those of Ibsen) were awaiting the attention of some influential man of the theatre.

By giving the collective title *Major Critical Essays* to *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, *The Perfect Wagnerite*, and *The Sanity of Art* Shaw claimed for them a status which they are unlikely to be accorded in the future. The first two have a special interest as pioneer works, and will serve students who need to know how Ibsen and Wagner struck an enthusiastic contemporary, but neither holds the reader's interest easily or is as attractive in style as most of Shaw's prose.

The Quintessence of Ibsenism makes three points in particular. First, that Ibsen's plays were aimed against idealism and idealists—a term which in some measure signifies conventions and conventionalists, but also those who (like Brand in Ibsen's early poetic drama of that name) victimize others by their own obsessive concentration upon an abstract standard of conduct, irrespective of the disasters it may lead to in practice. Second, that he opposed the then current assumption that every woman should be womanly, in the sense of conforming to a code of behaviour which gratified the male's desire and served his domestic and social convenience. Third, that the revolutionary technical novelty introduced by Ibsen was the Discussion Scene, through which he substituted for the old type of playmaking—exposition, situation, unravelling—the new type—exposition, situation, discussion. As will be seen in later chapters of the present book, this was also Shaw's innovation in English drama.

The Perfect Wagnerite is a philosophical treatise interpreting *The Niblung's Ring* as a revolutionary

political document. Since Wagner was later to be claimed as the precursor of an opposing political philosophy, *The Ring* is now universally accepted as a musical masterpiece but very little regarded as a political allegory.

The Sanity of Art is intermittently interesting for such things as Shaw's passing comments on Impressionist painting, on Wagner, on Ibsen, on law, on religion, on anarchism; but its original main purpose—to provide a counterblast to Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, a turgid attack on 'everything that Dr. Nordau does not happen to approve of', is of little moment now that Nordau's theme, having been repeated with a thousand variations by the unintelligentsia, is itself degenerate.

Chapter Four

FIRST PLAYS: 1885/92-1894

Widowers' Houses (1885/92)¹; *The Philanderer* (1893);
Mrs. Warren's Profession (1894)

BERNARD SHAW'S career as a playwright started with what he himself described as 'a grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism, municipal jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between them and the pleasant people with "independent" incomes who imagine that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives'. This statement of the theme of *Widowers' Houses* was given in the Preface to *Plays Unpleasant*, which came out together with *Plays Pleasant* in 1898 as the first published collection of Shaw's works for the stage. Rather more than twenty years later, in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*, he listed the subjects with which he had dealt in his plays: 'slum landlordism, doctrinaire Free Love (pseudo-Ibsenism), prostitution, militarism, marriage, history, current politics, natural Christianity, national and individual character, paradoxes of conventional society, husband-hunting, questions of conscience, professional delusions and impostures'

There was nothing that astonished in that catalogue, for Shaw had by that time fully accustomed theatre-audiences to the treatment of a wide range of serious

¹ The date of composition of individual plays is given at the beginnings of chapters. The date of publication is shown in the Bibliography (pp. 204 ff.).

subjects on the stage, whereas when he began 'The fashionable theatre prescribed one serious subject: clandestine adultery' Only by comparing his early works with those by the prosperous established playwrights of the second half of the nineteenth century—Dion Boucicault, Sydney Grundy, Henry Arthur Jones, A. W. Pinero, and others—is it possible to estimate the extent and importance of the revolution which Shaw effected by substituting the live material of current controversy for the threadbare stuff of stage-convention. And only through a comparison of his works with the attempts made by later playwrights to deal with social and political problems is it possible to estimate Shaw's success in absorbing intractable material into the substance of drama. From the scores of realistic problem plays written between 1900 and 1950 it would be difficult to list a dozen, other than his, that are likely to survive. Several reasons can be assigned for the fact that so large a proportion of Shaw's output has demonstrated its survival value; but the chief is that he always completely assimilated the problem into the bloodstream of the play. In the works of lesser playwrights the problem, in the great majority of instances, is merely regurgitated in undigested form. Shaw's problem plays have an independent existence *as plays*, because their subjects are (in his own phrase) 'all worked into a series of comedies of manners in the classic fashion . . .'. They survive as comedies, stretching the whole octave from occasional rough farce to frequent polished wit, but drawing chiefly upon the humour of character.

It is inevitable that a writer whose work runs against the prevailing current of majority opinion should be misunderstood and misrepresented. Indeed, the extent and depth of his influence is in direct proportion to the

intensity of the dissent he provokes, for the noisier the opposition the greater is the attention drawn to himself; while the more his aims and intentions are received with antagonism the more energetically and persistently will he be defended. The critics who repeated year after year that Shaw's plays were all talk and no drama, his characters puppets without a trace of humanity, his ideas wholly destructive, may have proved nothing more than their own obtuseness; but they helped to create an audience for the man they attacked and made it necessary to examine the dramatic content of his plays, to consider the nature of his characters, and to inquire into the charge that his work was lacking in constructive thought. These are matters upon which much still needs to be said.

Widowers' Houses, first published in 1892 as the inaugural volume of the Independent Theatre Society's series of plays, was begun seven years earlier on the suggestion of William Archer, who supplied (Shaw says) a 'thoroughly planned scheme for a sympathetically romantic "well made play" of the Parisian type then in vogue' in the London theatres. Shaw had used up Archer's material by the end of the second act, and while so doing had grafted on to it the sociological themes which were in the forefront of his own mind. The fragment mixed fashionable farce and serious purpose in a manner described by Shaw as 'revoltingly incongruous', and it was disowned absolutely by Archer. Thus began and ended at the age of twenty-nine the first phase of Bernard Shaw's experience as a playwright.

The founding of the Independent Theatre Society in London by J. T. Grein, a dramatic critic of Dutch extraction turned impresario, was made passingly

notorious but historically notable by the first English production of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. When no native plays suitable for this experimental theatre were forthcoming, Shaw added a third act to his fragment, 'gave it the far-fetched Scriptural title', and opened on 9 December 1892 the second and last phase of Bernard Shaw the playwright, a phase destined to fill nearly sixty years. *Widowers' Houses*, received with acclamation by the few but with derision by the many, started a newspaper controversy which did more to publicize Shaw in his new role than a long run of his play would have been likely to do. After its two Independent Theatre performances *Widowers' Houses* disappeared from the public sight for many years. Later, Shaw enthusiasts, compelled to judge the play in its printed form exclusively, were ready to agree that *Widowers' Houses* should be treated as a museum exhibit. Its revival on the London stage more than half a century after the first production showed, however, that it was a surprisingly live play: old-fashioned, no doubt, and therefore with some charm as a period piece; silly in part, though only with the silliness of innocents abroad in a world that was unquestionably muddle-minded but had not then plunged into total lunacy; crude in character-drawing, yet with the crudity that belongs to Nature, who does not always take pains to finish and burnish her creatures.

Faults and weaknesses in *Widowers' Houses* are easy to detect on the printed page when the criteria of academic literary criticism are applied; but there is an overriding consideration which determines the success or failure of every play in performance: does the author possess that indefinable (and, outside the theatre, undetectable) gift, *stage sense*? It is possible for a play to satisfy the requirements of literary art and yet fail

totally on the stage. It is possible, also, for a play to fail on the stage even when earnestness of purpose is added to literary merit, if stage sense is absent. On the other hand, the presence of stage sense often guarantees a play's success in the theatre, notwithstanding the absence of literary merit and moral or social purpose. This is the maddening mystery of the theatre, which has baffled many earnest writers in the twentieth century, and which leads to those periodical scoldings of the public that authors use to assuage their disappointments. No doubt it is desirable that theatregoers should be made aware of the defects of society and human nature, and good that they should be uplifted; but no duty can be imposed upon them to submit to boredom voluntarily and at their own expense. While the intelligent theatregoer does not ask that his senses should be titillated or that he should be continuously amused by hearty means, every theatregoer has the right to demand that he be entertained in some one or more of the many ways in which entertainment can be provided: by the creation and maintenance of interest; by mental stimulation; by wit and humour; by satisfaction of the aesthetic sense; by the enlargement of human sympathy and understanding; even by the provocation of dissent.

The secret of stage sense lies in its power to *rouse* the audience. An author who lacks this gift can never succeed as a playwright, for he lacks the dynamic without which no play can come to life.

Shaw's possession of this dynamic in superabundance accounted for the undiminished energy with which his plays took—and continue to take—the stage in successive revivals. It does in fact re-energize them as plays of character and comedies of manners after the immediacy of the current problems with which they deal has

worn away. This is at once the answer and the reason for the answer to what was at one time the paramount question in the minds of Shaw's critics—*Will his plays survive the currency of their contemporary themes?* The question has no longer to be asked in regard to the first dozen or so of his plays. They have survived the crucial period of fifty years during which works of the imagination tend to date as rapidly as women's fashions. A play which is alive half a century after it was written has a reasonable chance of outlasting centuries.

The term 'works of the imagination' is one which early critics of Shaw begrudged because of their persuasion that he was a realist purveying raw slices of life. Realism was so much in the atmosphere in the later part of the 1890s and in the first decades of the present century that any serious writer might find himself hustled into the realists' camp however little he belonged there. The realists were for the most part obsessed by the painful, the ugly, and the drab, and their talent was reproductive rather than creative; they aimed to imitate the underside of life, not to use life as a starting point for the imagination. Shaw, writing in the Preface to *Plays Unpleasant* of certain initial difficulties that had faced him, said: 'Not that I lacked the dramatist's gift. As far as that is concerned, I have encountered no limit but my own laziness to my power of conjuring up imaginary people in imaginary places, and finding pretexts for theatrical scenes between them. But to obtain a livelihood by this insane gift, I must have conjured so as to interest not only my own imagination, but that of at least some seventy or a hundred thousand contemporary London playgoers.' He overcame this difficulty not by schooling his imagination to give the public what the public supposed it wanted, but by stimulating the public

imagination to the point of enjoying what he presented on the stage and in print in terms of his own imagination. That is to say, he did not set out to scold the public into acceptance of what he believed to be good for it, but contrived to enlarge its mind and improve its taste until it wanted what he was equipped to provide. 'I wanted', he wrote in the Epistle Dedicatory to *Man and Superman*, 'a pit of philosophers.' What he got, within a few years, was something more remarkable and more worthwhile—a pit of philosophers enjoying themselves. For the first time in the history of the modern English theatre playgoers were finding that serious mental activity is not incompatible with laughter and fun.

The titles chosen by Shaw for his first two volumes—*Plays Unpleasant* and *Plays Pleasant*—were indicative of the break he was making with tradition in the choice of subject-matter for drama as well as in its treatment. The established main division into Tragedy and Comedy was unserviceable for his purpose, since the idea of Tragedy had an age-long association with exalted personages reaching a pinnacle of fame or achievement and then plunging to disaster; while modern Comedy was linked in the public mind with the frivolities of moneyed and leisured people. In the New Drama which Shaw aimed to establish, the characters were to be drawn from all ranks of society, not only from that privileged section labelled Society; they were to be mainly people with a background of employment, instead of appearing to live in a curiously ambiguous financial void, as had been customary for generations in the fashionable drama; and serious plays were not necessarily to hinge upon catastrophic reversals of fortune.

Widowers' Houses did not make a clean cut between the old drama and the new. It is interesting not only

for its innovations but also for its failure to clear away certain clinging tendrils of current stage conventions. By the time Shaw came to write the Preface to *Plays Unpleasant* he was aware of this failure: ' . . . though I took my theme seriously enough, I did not then take the theatre quite seriously, even in taking it more seriously than it took itself. The farcical trivialities in which I followed the fashion of the times became silly and irritating beyond all endurance when intruded upon a subject of such depth, reality, and force as that into which I had plunged my drama.' What those farcical trivialities amount to in the original stage version of 1885-92 is not evident in the standard 1898 text, and the author discouraged inquiry by alluding to the 1892 edition as one he would 'gladly annihilate if he could'. But even in the revised version Cokane has enough of the old stagey mannerisms to qualify him for exhibition as a pre-Shaw relic refurbished. Cokane has no specified means of support; he is of the *genus* man-about-town, and brother to those helpful gentlemen friends of the hero who so often and so tiresomely appear among the *dramatis personae* in the plays of Pinero and his school. They perform a mechanical stage function, but rarely exist as human beings in their own right. Yet Cokane has a more than ordinary significance. He is the first of that long line of 'constitutionally ridiculous' Englishmen who are as pronounced and characteristic a feature in Shaw's plays as are the clowns in Shakespeare's. These Englishmen—insular, pompous, snobbish, and bone-headed—are Shaw's stock figures of fun and may stand collectively as the 'stage Englishman', created as an Irish playwright's good-humoured revenge for the farcical 'stage Irishman' of many nineteenth-century melodramas popular in the English theatre.

Blanche Sartorius in *Widowers' Houses* is also a character caught midway between the old drama and the new. As a virago bullying and half-strangling her maid she is a lay figure lifted down from a peg in the wardrobe of melodrama;¹ but in taking the lead in the marriage-chase while thrusting responsibility on the man, she prefigures shadowily the New Woman of Shaw's plays who, developing through Vivie Warren, was to reach maturity as Ann Whitefield in *Man and Superman*. Dr. Trench, Blanche's chosen male, and Sartorius her father, the prosperous slum landlord and social climber, do little more than serve the theme of the play. The one genuinely original character is Lickcheese, for he alone comes alive and develops with something of that appearance of spontaneity and inward independence which belongs to genuinely imaginative creations. Beginning as Sartorius's obsequious rent-collector, Lickcheese rebels when he is sacked for spending too much on repairs to the ramshackle slum hovels, and shocks Trench by revealing the disgraceful source of the young man's prospective father-in-law's wealth. In the last act Lickcheese reappears as a grotesque bejewelled and fur-coated financier who has grown prosperous by rigging compensation claims on derelict property compulsorily acquired by public bodies for municipal housing schemes. Trench, having learned that his own main income is derived from mortgage-interest on Sartorius's slums, is at length persuaded by the other two men's specious arguments and Blanche's erotic wiles to shed his scruples and join the compensation racket.

Already in this first play Shaw proved himself capable

¹ In his essay on William Archer in *Pen Portraits and Reviews* Shaw mentions a street incident which suggested the tempestuous temper given to Blanche. It is nevertheless unconvincing in the play.

of the detachment essential to a playwright. Notwithstanding the fervour of detestation with which he was filled in considering the misery of slum-dwellers, he avoided the error of writing a mere tract in dialogue form. Social reforms which appear to be simple justice and plain common sense to some, are difficult to bring about for the reason that anti-reformers no less than reformers have a point of view which, to them, also represents justice and common sense. The mutual understanding of opposing points of view is an invaluable solvent in controversy, and it is in the balanced presentation of conflicting aspects of a problem that playwrights—Shaw among them—are superior to pamphleteers. The playwright's concern is with human beings in all their contrariety; the pamphleteer's with facts and cases which, however much we may deplore it, are of limited and temporary concern, whereas men and women shown in action on the stage are universally and perennially interesting and entertaining. Shaw's mastery of plain English prose gives aesthetic interest to his political and sociological writings as well as to his plays: even as a pamphleteer he was also an artist. But the solid marshalled argumentation in his lengthier non-dramatic works is more than the average mind can digest without exhausting effort and this large section of his literary output will almost certainly have a much shorter life than his plays. In the long run it is far more interesting for the majority of people to hear both sides of a question than to read an *ex parte* statement. In *Widowers' Houses* Sartorius and Lickcheese are allowed to put the slum-owner's and racketeer's point of view forcefully and eloquently; if the audience is convinced that the two are condemned out of their own mouths, Shaw's trust in the primary sense of human justice is vindicated.

His second play, *The Philanderer*, has more humour and dramatic flexibility than its predecessor, but it is hard to believe that even at the time it was written (1893) it could have been an effective illustration of its theme that the English marriage laws are responsible for 'grotesque sexual compacts'. In a note to the 1930 edition Shaw acknowledged that the play suffers from what he called the disease of dating, but he did not recognize—or at least did not point to—the true cause of the disease: namely, that the characters are lifeless. They are mostly mechanical figures of farce, and must have been as much so in the heyday of Ibsenism in the 1890s as now. The situations are more amusing than the people in them, and any unpleasantness that the play may have does not arise from its presentation of marriage as 'that worst of blundering abominations, an institution which society has outgrown but not modified', but from a general undignified capering. Charteris, the amorist at pains to elude the encagement of marriage, is best considered as a rough and undeveloped apprentice sketch of the type that developed into John Tanner in *Man and Superman*; while Julia Craven the termagant, whose tantrums are the overflow of unconscious biological necessity, is another of those several early Shaw 'heroines' who are in the line of descent from Blanche Sartorius to Ann Whitefield. The Ibsen Club in which the second act of *The Philanderer* is set was a timely joke in the 1890s, when its conditions of membership—that women candidates must be vouched for as unwomanly and men as unmanly—chimed with the emancipated woman's notion that womanliness was weak and servile and that male manliness emphasized sex differences which should be levelled out. The joke now misses fire and has become ludicrous; the notion that once

seemed funny has turned rancid and appears pretentiously silly.

What wears best in *The Philanderer* is the medical joke. Through the main part of the play old Colonel Stevens believes himself to be mortally stricken by a liver complaint discovered by Dr. Paramore and proudly named by him 'Paramore's disease'. Later, when foreign investigators with unlimited resources for vivisection prove that there is no such disease, Paramore is desolate. Before that, Charteris had mocked Craven as a 'devout believer in the department of witchcraft called medical science'—a theme which Shaw was to take up again some twelve years later and develop with ingenious variations in one of his best plays *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

The last of the three *Plays Unpleasant*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, is theoretically convincing in its argument that prostitution was caused by a social system in which the poverty arising from underpaid labour or enforced unemployment led women to sell their affections and sexual services. The validity of the argument has been somewhat shaken since 1894 by the persistence of prostitution into a period when employment for all was available at fair wages. That this social evil has continued might be attributed in part to such disabilities as bad parentage, low mentality, neglect of moral education, and the consequences of war—all of which could be included among 'the crimes of society' against which Shaw's plays were directed. But it is less certain now than it seemed to be in 1894 that 'prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women'. Indeed, even in Shaw's play it is far from certain that Mrs. Warren was entirely a victim of the crimes of society.

Her self-excusing do not hide the fact that she is an extremely cheerful and exuberant woman of pleasure who has flourished abundantly on sin. Nor is it possible to overlook the curious situation of so moral an artist as Shaw himself in this morality play. For the first time in his dramatic writings the creator was possessed by one of his creations. Mrs. Warren belongs to that rare company of fictional characters who turn upon their authors (as Becky Sharp did upon Thackeray) and refuse to lend themselves passively to the will of the playwright or novelist. We feel that when Mrs. Warren—this 'genial and fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman'—first steps into that Surrey cottage garden a little south of Haslemere she has in actual fact just come across from one of her establishments in Brussels or Ostend or Vienna or Budapest; that the play is no more than a passing episode in her busy self-contenting life; and that when, as the final curtain falls, she slams the door behind her a moment after saying 'Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing', Kitty Warren's black old soul will go marching back with undiminished vim to her well-conducted houses of vice in Brussels and Ostend and Vienna and Budapest.

Fortunately for morality—that persevering but often unregarded handmaid of the arts—Mrs. Warren is not the only live character in the play. It is to morality's profit that Mrs. Warren's financial partner, Sir George Crofts, is so odious a villain that the custom of hissing in the theatre might well be revived to express detestation of him (though Shaw says, not unwarrantably, in the Preface to *Plays Pleasant*, that he allows even Crofts to have and express a point of view). Vivie Warren, Kitty's independent-minded, strong-willed, third-wrangler daughter, is a prig; but as she is a prig who does not alienate the

audience's sympathies she must be considered a triumph of dramatic portraiture and human understanding, for though prigs in real life usually deserve moral applause they seldom win sympathy. Perhaps more than sympathy, Vivie Warren earns respect; so much so that one would feel more comfortable if the author and characters called her, formally, Miss Warren. It seems a liberty even to think of her as Vivie, and the only moments when she ceases to be convincing are those in which she speaks baby language to the young man, Frank Gardner, who is in love with her: e.g. 'Vivvums is not in a humor for petting her little boy this evening' and 'The dear little boy with his dowdy little girl.' No doubt girls who have distinguished themselves in the mathematical tripos have spoken thus to their lovers, and it must therefore be taken as a lapse on Shaw's part that he failed to make Vivie convincing in those short scenes.

The banning of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by the English censor of plays, and police action against the performing company in New York, caused the piece to be wrapped for many years in an ignorant notoriety which obscured its quality as a play. Now that it can be performed in public without let or hindrance it is possible to estimate the remarkable advance in Shaw's quality as a playwright in the short interval between *The Philanderer* and this play. His peculiar contribution to English drama—the discussion scene—reaches a high level in the two colloquies between Mrs. Warren and Vivie and in Crofts' attempt to blackmail Vivie into marrying him: all three scenes have that high dramatic tension and unique verbal interest by which Shaw contrived to rivet the audience's attention in passages of conversation. His reliance on words as the chief—and often the sole—weapon in the

field of mental conflict to which his plays were intentionally confined, inclined him to neglect and perhaps to despise opportunities for 'good theatre' which other playwrights would grasp thankfully. If Shaw had been concerned with pure stage showmanship, he would have ended the second act of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* two or three minutes earlier, using Crofts' shattering final words as the curtain line. But how would he then have conveyed to Frank Gardner the address at which Vivie could be found when she fled to London after Crofts' infamous implication? She had told Praed in the first act that she spent six weeks in May working in her friend Honoria Fraser's chambers in Chancery Lane, and this information would have sufficed to justify the location of Act III, in which Frank, Praed, and her mother call upon Vivie in those chambers. To all three she says goodbye, and the play closes on the prospect that her life is thereafter to be confined to actuarial calculations.

Even if *Mrs. Warren's Profession* were inferior as a play it would still have a period interest and a claim to be charted as a landmark in English drama, for Vivie Warren was the first stage heroine to fill that role as a business woman (or, in a more modern idiom, career woman), not as a woman of sentiment or passion. She is an early model New Woman, living on her mental substance instead of on her emotions; the first of Shaw's many anti-romantics; and very typically so, for she is not merely anti-romantic towards romance of the amorous, sentimental, or hero-worshipping sort, but also towards her own educational success. To Praed, who has been glowing with praise of her university achievements, she answers: '... do you know what the mathematical tripos means? It means grind, grind, grind for six to eight

hours a day at mathematics, and nothing but mathematics. I'm supposed to know something about science; but I know nothing except the mathematics it involves. I can make calculations for engineers, electricians, insurance companies, and so on; but I know next to nothing about engineering or electricity or insurance. I don't even know arithmetic well. Outside mathematics, lawn-tennis, eating, sleeping, cycling, and walking, I'm a more ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who hadn't gone in for the tripos.' This indication of the possibility of profound human ignorance as the price to be paid for specialized education must have seemed outrageous in academic quarters in the 1890s; in the 1950s it reads as a statement of fact with a regretably wide application as the tendency grows for highly-educated persons to know more and more about less and less.

Vivie Warren was a human portent, and the play (if it had then been performed) would have been a stage portent. With *Mrs. Warren's Profession* Shaw ended his apprenticeship and the New Drama, as well as the New Woman, was born. The New Drama must be so called, for it was a radical departure from the current mode, though its affinity with the work of Molière and other and earlier playwrights becomes increasingly apparent as the topical themes dwindle in importance and the fundamentals become clear.

So far as Britain is concerned, the New Drama was Shaw's invention and in most respects he must continue to be regarded as its sole patentee. When his plays attain that degree of venerableness at which they will achieve a double reputation, being received as classic English Literature and also as classic stage plays, it will be as troublesome to writers of essays and theses to

specify Shaw's influence on So-and-So as it is to perform a like feat in regard to Shakespeare. It would, however, be a simple matter to point out the extraordinary harm done by each of these men of genius. It is the fate of a genius to attract a host of would-be imitators whose admiration robs them of their senses and makes them oblivious to the elementary fact that no genius can be imitated. Genius consists in nothing but uniqueness. Scores of attempts to imitate Shakespeare's uniqueness did incalculable damage to English poetic drama through three centuries, for the imitators produced only bad copies of Shakespearean blank verse. Shaw's imitators did no more than produce drearily solemn realistic tracts in dialogue form based on a fundamental misapprehension, for Shaw as a playwright—i.e. as a dramatic artist—was not a realist. The only realistic factor in his plays was the topical factor: slums, or prostitution, or this or that other social evil. But in itself this is mere blue-book stuff, and the playwrights who set out to use such material, supposing that *ipso facto* they were following in the steps of Shaw and promoting the New Drama, turned a blind eye to everything in Shaw that was worth seeing. The diversion of blue-book material to stage use was only Shaw's novelty—a novelty which explains nothing about Shaw the playwright, inasmuch as his genius was displayed in what he did with the material, not in the opportunism which led him, as much instinctively as rationally, to so timely a choice. The lesser dramatists who supposed that some curious merit inhered in the material itself proved only that uninspired dramatizations of blue-book themes promote virtue as little as they provide entertainment. The dull earnest man's dullness is always the victorious enemy of his earnestness.

When the discussion scene is pointed to as Shaw's technical innovation in English drama (as it was Ibsen's abroad), again nothing is explained. It is true that when Cokane said to Trench, in Act II of *Widowers' Houses*, '... sit down and listen; and consider the matter calmly and judicially' he was creating a far more important precedent than he could possibly have guessed. Whereas it had been common form for stage characters to stand on their feet and wrangle violently and with prejudice, thus being 'dramatic', Shaw's characters invariably sit down when any crucial problem is to be threshed out. Then comes the wonder. For it is in those static scenes that Shaw's genius is displayed. From words alone he weaves an irresistible spell. Some might say that it is more with ideas than with words that he played with such unsurpassed skill, yet the ideas are nothing without words to carry them. Shaw compelled his audience to listen by providing aesthetic pleasure as the reward for listening. The drama of ideas was his medium, but it was as a virtuoso prose artist with the power to make words act precisely as he intended, that he succeeded in turning an austere medium into a beguiling instrument.

Chapter Five

EARLY COMEDIES AND HISTORIES: 1894-1900

Arms and the Man (1894); *Candida* (1895); *The Man of Destiny* (1895); *You Never Can Tell* (1896); *The Devil's Disciple* (1897); *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898); *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900)

LITTLE more than a year passed between the Independent Theatre Society's semi-private production of *Widowers' Houses* and Shaw's first appearance as a dramatist on the public stage in London with *Arms and the Man* at the Avenue Theatre on 21 April 1894. In the meantime he had written the other two plays discussed in the preceding chapter, neither of which was performed at that time. *Arms and the Man* ran for about six weeks, with average takings of little more than £23 for each of the seventy-six performances. This was as near as Shaw got to success in England until 1904, when Edward VII patronized *John Bull's Other Island*.

Yet *Arms and the Man* was recognized and welcomed later as one of the classic English comedies, and it has taken an assured place in the English repertory. It attained that position on the author's own uncompromising terms, establishing a revised standard of values in a region where the prevailing standard appeared unchallengable—in the military region of gentlemanly pretence that the soldier's staple fare is heroics, and glory his chief concern. If Shaw had done no more than

recall attention to the Napoleonic maxim that an army marches on its stomach, if his Swiss mercenary fighting for the Serbs had carried an iron-ration or a gobbet of meat in his pistol holster, it is likely that few military sensibilities would have been wounded and that little more would have been heard of *Arms and the Man*. A hungry soldier's craving for food would have appeared mildly pathetic, and the audience would have responded with mild sympathy. Food merely as food is not funny. If, therefore, Bluntschli had craved for meat or bread or biscuit there would in all probability have been little laughter, and the play would then have perished of its own mildness, its truth unheeded. Twenty years were to go by before the events of 1914 and after demonstrated the essential truth of *Arms and the Man*; then, its fantastic manner of presenting the truth came as a comic safety-valve in a time of unbounded horror.

Shaw's strategy depended upon unexpectedness and audacity of attack, which unbalances and confuses the opponent and leads him to work his own undoing. An angry man rushes into argument with his guard down. Shaw's perfect mental control always safeguarded him from indulgence in anger—or, at least, from any public expression or display of anger—and to that interior discipline his unshaken self-assurance was due. He never attempted to carry an excessive head of steam and consequently his safety-valves were never under strain. His opponents, on the other hand, blew many safety-valves and wasted their steam in futile verbal explosions and hissings while Shaw went steadily and always merrily on his way to the next encounter.

In *Arms and the Man* the audacity of the attack on the romantic view of war consists in Bluntschli's enthusiastic gobbling of Raina's chocolate creams, which she

offers to him contemptuously after he has said 'I've no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead; and I finished the last cake of that hours ago.' If Bluntschli had asked for a good square meal no slur upon military honour would have been charged against Shaw. What angered the men of war in the 1890s was the confectionery—which at that time was fed ingratiatingly to pretty women as a lubricant to amorous romance, chocolate not having then secured the approval of army dieticians as a battle-worthy concentrated food.

The enduring value of comedy as a weapon against war as well as against other crimes and follies may be gauged from the fact that *Arms and the Man* is still undimmed after more than half a century, while innumerable tracts and many tragedies have in the meantime been written, read, seen, and forgotten. Yet, though Shaw's comedy is still fresh and entertaining, it often makes us laugh 'at the other side of our mouths'—a phrase Bluntschli uses in his account of the cavalry charge which had excited dreams of glory in Raina's imagination when it was described to her by another eye-witness. Bluntschli's description might refer to any such episode as Tennyson commemorated in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*—but it is a plain soldier's first-hand account instead of a homekeeping poet's reconstruction: 'Of course, they just cut us to bits. And there was Don Quixote [Raina's betrothed, Major Sergius Saranoff, the leader of the charge] flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be courtmartialled for it. . . .'

Several of Shaw's plays have survived by outliving their contemporary themes—*Mrs. Warren's Profession*, for example, in which the particular view of prostitution

is now overshadowed by the human interest of the characters in the drama; but *Arms and the Man* survives entire. In satirizing the romantic view of war and of love it deals with two perennial subjects; while the incidents and characters (notwithstanding that the scene is Bulgaria and the year 1885) are universal in appeal even though they are not planned on the grand scale. To call Bluntschli a *great* comic character would be extravagant; he is, however, a tenacious comic figure who is safe for a permanent place in the national gallery of stage characters. His freedom from romantic illusions might have made him seem a dull dog or a pompous prig, but he has a saving grace of whirlwind exuberance which carries him invigoratingly through the play and sweeps Raina from dizzy operatic-hero worship towards him and his unromantic but prosperous Swiss hotel. Yet *Arms and the Man* is far from being a one-man play. Seven of the eight characters are 'good acting parts', and the stage situations are admirably contrived, with strong dramatic tension in the first half of Act I when Bluntschli takes refuge in Raina's room from his pursuers. Though it is a play of challenging ideas, satisfyingly packed with mental nourishment and seasoned with wit and interpenetrated with humour in the fashion that was characteristically Shaw's, its pervading human warmth is so seductive that its sub-title 'An Anti-Romantic Comedy' could be changed to 'A Comedy To Please Those Who Do Not Like Bernard Shaw'.

Candida, which follows *Arms and the Man* as the second in the *Plays Pleasant* volume, is sub-titled 'A Mystery'. It has worn less well than most of Shaw's plays (except those later ones which are positive failures), partly because it is far more difficult now than it was then to

feel sympathetic interest in a lovelorn poet of the aesthetic school who is horrified because his ideal woman does domestic chores; but more because of what has come to seem the smugness of Candida, of her husband (The Rev. James Mavor Morell), and of the poet (Eugene Marchbanks). The chief weakness is that the play is much better in its parts than as a whole; the characters are more notable individually than for what they contribute to the general pattern.

Morell, 'a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England' whom the descriptive stage direction leads one to believe Shaw found likeable, is a professional politico-religious popular orator, adored by his spinster-secretary, coddled by his wife, despised by Marchbanks, and popular with his congregation because (as Candida tells him) 'They're all in love with you. And you are in love with preaching because you do it beautifully. And you think it's all enthusiasm for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; and so do they. . . .'

Though there are several references to Candida's own off-stage life—she is a mother, she trims the lamps and peels the onions, she nurses the children (who are away from home and do not appear) through German measles—Shaw did not succeed in making her a free-moving, three-dimensional character who convinces us that she has an active part in the wider and fuller life of the outside world, of which life in the play is a microscopic segment. This stage-isolation is a fault common to many plays but not usually to Shaw's.

Of Marchbanks there is next to nothing to say, since Bernard Shaw was on foreign ground in dealing with such a character. When the poet turns on Morell and tells him that Candida as his wife is 'fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric', he is a different

Marchbanks from the one that speaks elsewhere and is described on his first appearance as 'a strange, shy youth of eighteen, slight, effeminate, with a delicate childish voice, and a hunted tormented expression and shrinking manner'. The thirty-nine-year old Shaw imposed himself intermittently upon the eighteen-year-old Marchbanks and split the character. Only through an actor's skill can Marchbanks be made convincing, whereas the performers of other parts in Shaw's plays are almost wholly in debt to the author. In general his plays are actor-proof.

Burgess—'vulgar, ignorant, guzzling', 'coarse and sordid', 'offensive and contemptuous to people whose labor is cheap, respectful to wealth and rank', offered by the world 'no decently paid work except that of a sweater' of underpaid workpeople—is, dramatically, the most satisfactory character in the play, except that it is impossible to believe in him as *Candida's* father. Educated daughters do have illiterate fathers, but Shaw does not make this particular instance credible. Burgess belongs to that rascally Cockney company which includes Lickcheese, Drinkwater (*Captain Brassbound's Conversion*), Snobby Price (*Major Barbara*), Alfred Doolittle (*Pygmalion*), and the Burglar in *Heartbreak House*. They all prey on society, though with widely differing monetary and social consequences.

The crux of *Candida* and the source of its 'mystery' is in the final scene between Morell and his wife and Marchbanks, when *Candida* settles the contest of the two males by announcing that she will give herself 'to the weaker of the two'. Before going on to explain her meaning she says 'Let us sit and talk comfortably over it like three friends' and the play ends with the ensuing discussion scene in which *Candida* chooses her

husband as the weaker. Marchbanks, says the final stage-direction, 'flies out into the night . . . they do not know the secret of the poet's heart.' This is strangely unnatural language to appear in a play by Shaw; and it is no great mystery or secret that an artist is stronger—i.e. is better able to stand alone—than the Morells who from babyhood have been cossetted by doting women.

Shaw began *The Man of Destiny* in 1895 'to display the virtuosity of the actor and actress who played Napoleon and The Strange Lady'. This one-act piece is among the least indispensable of his plays, and whether read or seen its tiresomeness overwhelms all else. The complicated nonsense about a young woman disguising herself as a man and masquerading as her own brother in order to get by a confidence trick from a French lieutenant a packet of despatches including a compromising private love-letter; about how she turns up in her own clothes at an inn on the road from Lodi to Milan where Napoleon is awaiting the despatches, which he with difficulty obtains from her; about the plot which she concocts with the young lieutenant to masquerade again as her twin brother in order to save the lieutenant from being shot for losing the despatches; about the burning of the private letter (which presumably compromised Napoleon's wife Josephine with Barras) and of how, as it burns, Napoleon and The Strange Lady 'simultaneously turn their eyes and look at one another. The curtain steals down and hides them' . . . all of that would appear dully libellous if it had been written by another hand as a parody of Shaw. The only passages which excuse the preservation of *The Man of Density* are Napoleon's speech on fear, the 'one universal passion', and the later conversation in which he explains the English satirically

and at considerable length, saying *inter alia*: 'There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find an Englishman doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle. . . . His watchword is always Duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side to its interest is lost. . . .'

In the last of the four *Plays Pleasant* Shaw returned to his best form. *You Never Can Tell* is a more substantial if not a better play than *Arms and the Man*; its material is less barely economical and less restricted in range. It is less neat and tidy than the earlier play, but if it sprawls, it sprawls comfortably and delightfully.

Doubt concerning children's paternity is one of the oldest devices in fiction and stage plays, and Shaw made liberal use of it. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* leaves the identity of Vivie's father undiscovered, and she concerns herself little with the problem apart from the shock of Crofts' allegation that she was Frank Gardner's illegitimate half-sister. It is otherwise in *You Never Can Tell*, where the three young Clandons clamour to discover the name of their father, whom they were too young to remember when their mother separated from him as a violent-tempered, drunken, and unfaithful husband. The family solicitor later excuses these habits as the consequence of an unsuitable and incompatible marriage to a hard woman, and pleads for the husband as one of 'the people who do kind things in an unkind way! people whose touch hurts, whose voices jar, whose tempers play them false, who wound and worry the people they love in the very act of trying to conciliate them, and who yet need affection as much as the rest of us. . . .' As this quotation indicates, there is serious

writing in *You Never Can Tell*, but the play abounds in light-hearted fun. The opening scene in a dentist's operating room is an ingenious piece of humorous opportunism. Toothache and tooth-pulling have long been part of the staple material of the English music-hall stage, but it was left to Shaw to elevate this somewhat gruesome topic to the plane of genuine comedy and to choose a struggling dentist, Valentine, as hero. The scenes between him and Gloria, the senior of the three young Clandons, represent the first full-scale exhibition of love-making in the Shaw mode, which was then a new mode. The man, instead of sinking into a conventional romantic coma, feels himself caught up unwillingly by a force which renders him helpless. When Valentine speaks of this, Gloria asks protestingly 'Helpless?' 'Yes, helpless. As if Nature, after letting us belong to ourselves and do what we judged right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us—her two little children—by the scruffs of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves, for her own purposes in her own way.' Nothing could be more characteristic of Shaw's readiness and ability to use light comedy as a vehicle for serious discussion than the injection of such a passage into a work which he claims (in the Preface to *Plays Pleasant*) was written to meet the popular liking for 'fun, fashionable dresses, a little music' and a display of expensive eating and drinking with a comic waiter in attendance. William, the comic waiter—and father of an imposing and prosperous Queen's Counsel—is Shaw's most lovable character up to that time; while Valentine, with his consciousness of being used in spite of himself for Nature's purposes, must be singled out as the first of the new genus of heroes created by Shaw, the first

conscious vehicle of the Life Force (though Shaw had not at that time adopted the term that was to become central in his thinking and writing) who nevertheless—as men do—seeks to escape his destiny. The love scenes in *You Never Can Tell* provide, at one and the same time, excellent comedy and underlying seriousness. They represent that duel of sex in which victory must go to the woman in order to serve Nature's purpose of continuing the race. Valentine, 'half delighted, half frightened' is torn between the powerful attraction which draws him to Gloria and his awareness that to her—as any man ultimately to any woman—he is fundamentally only the potential father of her children. The stress laid by Shaw upon biological purpose, instead of upon romantic delight, as the basic motive in the love relationship of men and women was for many years shocking to popular opinion. At first Gloria could have seemed no better than what was then called 'a forward hussy', for she takes the initiative when Valentine is making his most desperate effort to escape her: '[Her grip of his arms tightens; and she kisses him . . . he reels back into the chair like a leaf before the wind . . .]'. A few moments later, as the play ends, Valentine '[collapsing on the ottoman and staring at the waiter]' says: 'I might as well be a married man already. [The waiter contemplates the captured Duellist of Sex with affectionate commiseration, shaking his head slowly]'. The vital explicatory gloss on the Valentine-Gloria contest was not at that time yet written. It was to come in Ana's final words in Act III of *Man and Superman*: 'I believe in the Life to Come. [Crying to the Universe] A father! a father for the Superman!'

While the central theme of *You Never Can Tell* is concerned with the root purpose of sexual union, the

play is neither a sexual play nor a play about sex. It is mentally and morally but not sensually stimulating, and in that respect it was, by the author's deliberate intention, at variance with prevailing taste and custom in the theatres of the 1890s, when the wolfish pleasures of sex tastefully costumed and decorated, and expressed in language ambiguous enough to satisfy both the Censor of Plays and the sensual playgoer, were regarded as a passport to success. Shaw's first seven plays—those included in the two *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* volumes—all opposed a puritan standard to the fashionable licentious one; but only with his third volume, *Three Plays for Puritans*, did he proclaim his intention in set terms in another of the lengthy Prefaces which were soon to be regarded as essential supplements to his published plays, though the later prefaces tended to be independent essays in uniquely good English prose rather than commentaries on the plays they prefaced. 'I call the Puritans to rescue [the English theatre] again as they rescued it before when its foolish pursuit of pleasure sunk it in "profaneness and immorality"', Shaw wrote, and he went on to say that in spite of his love of fine music and other works of art he would acquiesce in the destruction of every one of them if they became 'the instruments of a systematic idolatry of sensuousness'.

Puritans hearkened little to this call, however, partly because the puritan section of the community was then unable to conceive that any good at all could by any means be made to come from the theatre, and partly because Shaw (who declared that he had always been a puritan in his attitude towards Art) was regarded by puritans who knew anything whatsoever about him as more undesirable than the publicans and sinners who were content with the theatre as it was. Certainly the

first of the *Three Plays for Puritans* was unlikely to commend itself to orthodox religionists, for Mrs. Dudgeon in *The Devil's Disciple* (a suspicion-arousing title) is a horrifying embodiment of brutal religiosity devoid of compassion. The conjunction of opposites was not at that time an idea that could hope to engage attention or sympathy, and it did not help at all for Shaw to proclaim himself a follower of William Blake and to explain that Dick Dudgeon's religion owed nearly everything to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Nevertheless the play was liked in the theatre, though mainly in America, where it laid the foundation of Shaw's fortune. That it was in the early years liked for the wrong reasons seems certain. Critics praised it for its originality, though the author insisted that there was nothing original in it and that what had not been borrowed from Blake had been taken from the stock material of melodrama: 'A Melodrama' is its sub-title. There can be little doubt that it attracted popular audiences by its use of familiar ingredients, listed in the Preface as 'the reading of the will, the oppressed orphan finding a protector, the arrest, the heroic sacrifice, the court martial, the scaffold, the reprieve at the last moment'—ingredients from which the critics and the public were able to concoct a familiar and palatable romantic dish. That theirs was entirely different from the author's own dish and that the actors (in the playwright's absence) preferred the unauthorized one was disconcerting only to Shaw. The crux of the misinterpretation lay in the reading of Dick Dudgeon's character. He was preferred as a romantic self-sacrificing hero prepared to go to his death for the sake of a woman, rather than as Shaw intended him to be—a reputed 'bad man', described by Judith Anderson as 'a blasphemer and a villain', who was moved to do a good

deed by some saving grace which is neither more nor less than the law of his own nature, a law that he could not go against even when it meant putting his neck into the hangman's noose by allowing himself to be mistaken for Minister Anderson, Judith's husband.

The Devil's Disciple is one of Shaw's less important plays and its main interest in the body of his work is that it can be considered as a trial sketch of a theme which was developed later in a mature work, *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*. None of the characters in *The Devil's Disciple* stands out memorably from the background, not even General Johnny Burgoyne, who was in life a writer of comedies as well as a leader of the English forces in the American Revolution of the 1770s, in which capacity he appears in this play. He is more interesting in the note which Shaw appended to *The Devil's Disciple* than in his appearance on the stage. Dick Dudgeon himself hardly lives up to his nickname and it is necessary to look onwards to Blanco Posnet for a more convincing devil's disciple and a more worthy convert to righteousness.

Shaw's first exercises in historical drama in *The Man of Destiny* and *The Devil's Disciple* were not impressive, but judgement of them in that category is disarmed by his description of the one as 'A Trifle' and of the other as 'A Melodrama'. His next play, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, however, is boldly called 'A History' and is altogether a weightier work. Its inclusion among the plays for Puritans is justified in the Preface by the suggestion that it may be taken as a counterblast to the sexual romanticism of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The apothegm 'All for love and the world well lost', as a popular variant of Dryden's title, was blasphemy to

Shaw; that Shakespeare should make tragedy out of the debauchery of Antony and the wantonness of Cleopatra by turning 'his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business', and show Antony 'running away from the battle of Actium for love of Cleopatra', was unbearable to him. He therefore chose Caesar, a man with a prodigious capacity for work, as a more admirable figure than Antony with his sexual infatuation; more admirable also as a leader who could manage men, in contrast to the one who allowed himself to be mismanaged by a woman. By declaring that sexual infatuation is not a tragic theme—including in sexual infatuation a great deal of what most people call love—Shaw also declared by implication his temperamental incapacity to enter into a wide range of emotional experiences. There is no gainsaying the temporal justice of 'All for work and the world well gained', yet it is a doctrine only for supermen to whom self-chosen work provides the highest conceivable inward satisfaction or for slaves who know no aspiration towards the unattainable. But Caesar is allowed his moments of doubt in this play, as when he cries: '. . . this tedious, brutal life of action! that is the worst of us Romans: we are mere doers and drudgers: a swarm of bees turned into men. Give me a good talker—one with wit and imagination enough to live without continually doing something!'

Shaw's repudiation of the principal source of material for poetic tragedy is in a slight measure compensated by the discovery in himself of a capacity for exalted rhetoric. But for his distrust, amounting almost to fear, of his own instinctive aesthetic impulses, the creative energy which he kept in bonds might well have produced more than rhetoric, fine though that is in Shaw's

best passage of declamation, where it must be both admired for what it is and regretted because it was never allowed to become more than a kind of strangled poetry.

Explaining his use of blank verse for *The Admirable Bashville*, adapted from his novel *Cashel Byron's Profession*, Shaw said that he found it much easier to write than prose. The quality of the blank verse in that adaptation need not be considered; but its existence gives point to the impression made by Caesar's address to the Sphinx at the opening of Act I of *Caesar and Cleopatra* that it might easily have flowed in verse form—at least in free-verse form—if the author had permitted it to follow a natural channel. In 1912 Shaw wrote for this play a Prologue to be spoken by an 'august personage' standing in semi-darkness within the doorway of the temple of Ra and addressed directly to the modern audience. In this, too, there is poetic dignity of movement, reminiscent of the rising and falling cadences of the Old Testament prophetic books in the English Authorized Version, and therefore harking back, however remotely, to Hebrew poetry.

Caesar and Cleopatra, Shaw's ninth play, was his most ambitious thus far—in the number of its characters, in its elaboration of setting, and in the complexity of its thematic material. While it has numerous commendable qualities and is impressive and satisfyingly substantial, it is not a thoroughly integrated work and therefore fails to achieve unity of effect. The character of Caesar needed to be drawn with a stronger line and to be more closely articulated with the other characters. We see him to be sensible, amiable, and humorous; we observe that he sets clemency above ruthlessness as the desirable ruling quality in a conqueror; he engages the audience's

John



Saint Joan

1924



sympathy and liking; but as a figure in the drama and in the technical stage sense he is deficient in authority. The audience's attention needs to be canalized through him to the other characters, whereas it is dispersed and in some degree dissipated by a switching of interest from character to character. In brief, the play requires more effective organization. Nevertheless, it provides excellent entertainment for the mind and ear and eye, and among the lesser characters, Cleopatra's head nurse Ftatateeta and Caesar's secretary Britannus are at least as memorable as the two principals; and since they owe nothing to historical models they are more significant dramatic creations. Though Britannus is guyed as an ancient Briton with the characteristics of the modern Englishman as he appeared in Shaw's eyes, he is a genuine and legitimate figure of fun even when his quips are elementary. Shaw claimed that apparent anachronisms were apparent only to those who do not admit that there is no basis for 'the common assumption that the civilized contemporaries of the Hittites were unlike their civilized descendents today'. Accordingly Britannus bestrides the centuries when he says: 'Blue is the color worn by all Britons of good standing. In war we stain our bodies blue; so that though our enemies may strip us of our clothes and our lives, they cannot strip us of our respectability.'

Captain Brassbound's Conversion is remembered less on its own merits than for the fact that the author wrote it for Ellen Terry (who did not appear in it however until 1906, seven years after it was finished) and in *Lady Cicely Waynflete* devised a character possessing the ineluctable charm and grace and good sense of the actress who grows even more exquisite in the memories of

those who knew her than she was while she lived. The scene in which Lady Cicely imperturbably mends the torn jacket of the angry and revengeful bandit, Captain Brassbound, and soothes him into a more rational state by a combination of stitchery and common sense, is as delightful as anything to be found in Shaw's plays and is undoubtedly a projection of that warm affection for Ellen Terry which is expressed in his letters to her.

Shaw's lifelong interest in the London Cockney dialect, first shown in the attempt in *Candida* to render Burgess's speech phonetically and culminating in *Pygmalion*, appears also in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* in the phonetic notation of Drinkwater's speeches and in the supplementary note on 'English and American Dialects'. As to Rankin, 'I have made only the most perfunctory attempt to represent the dialect of the missionary', wrote Shaw at the end of the note. 'There is no literary notation for the grave music of good Scotch.'

No other of Shaw's plays leans so heavily upon a single character as *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* does upon Lady Cicely. In spite of the attraction of the exotic setting in Morocco, in spite of the capture of the party by bandits and the revenge motive of Brassbound against Lady Cicely's brother, the judge who had dispossessed Brassbound's mother and is by the son held responsible for her death, the play flags when Lady Cicely is not dominating the stage.

Chapter Six

MAN AND SUPERMAN: 1901-1903

NO one whose knowledge of Bernard Shaw was limited to the ten plays he had written up to 1900, when he reached the age of forty-four, could have been prepared for his forward leap, as thinker, as playwright, and as prose artist in *Man and Superman*. In the history of English literature this work stands as a positive masterpiece in two respects. It was the first masterpiece of the twentieth century, not only in date but also in tendency, for it represented a complete break with nineteenth-century English thinking and literary practice such as Shaw's own earlier writings alone had faintly foreshadowed. It was also the first indubitable masterpiece of the new intellectual drama, and it is still unequalled among the products of that movement. In later years Shaw was emphatically of the opinion that *Back to Methuselah* was his paramount achievement, an opinion confidently disputed by many attentive students of his work. *Back to Methuselah* lacks the freshness and surprise of *Man and Superman*—it could not be otherwise, since what sprang newly minted from Shaw's mind in the opening years of the century had become so generally familiar twenty years afterwards as to have reached the hallowed level of the commonplace. Moreover, *Back to Methuselah* is a patchy work, with casual flippancies to which the humour of *Man and Superman* never descends and with *longueurs* for which there is no

place throughout the taut and athletically vigorous argument in the earlier work. The younger Shaw was seeing visions; the older dreaming dreams in which his ultimate ideal of a state of existence confined to Pure Thought seemed hardly better than a mechanistic nightmare to those who were still too young to turn their backs upon the actual world where, despite its accompanying frustrations and confusions, emotional no less than mental experience is a seed-bed of wisdom. In *Man and Superman* the characters are persons of our flesh and blood, even in the Hell scene; in *Back to Methuselah* they are mostly (though not entirely) either portents or symbols. It is, however, only by the standard of Shaw's own best that much of *Back to Methuselah* seems second-rate.

Both plays suffer seriously from their own amplitude. Spread over five performances *Back to Methuselah* is bound to lose a good deal of the cumulative effect that would be experienced if it could be seen as a whole within one day. Though *Man and Superman* is very much shorter, it is still too long for production in its entirety in the course of a normal single performance, and only very infrequently has the whole work been done. The custom of omitting the Hell scene (Act III) is a public misfortune which cannot be compensated by rare separate performances of this mentally exciting and inspiring discussion between Don Juan, The Devil, The Statue, and Doña Ana. It must be hoped that the directors of the National Theatre-to-be will organize annual Shaw seasons during which there will be each year a complete production of *Man and Superman*, for without this third act the play dwindles from 'A Comedy and a Philosophy', as it is sub-titled, to a pleasant and intelligent comedy which is, nevertheless, of the highest class in its kind, rousing and uniquely important. If

the whole play had been done at the first performance on 21 May 1905 (it was not until 4 June 1907 that the omitted portion was seen, as a separate one-act piece entitled *Don Juan in Hell*), that day would go on record as the most important in the British theatre calendar since the seventeenth century.

But as no such red-letter day occurred, it is of more than passing interest to attempt to approach *Man and Superman*, through the printed text, in something of the frame of mind that might have been brought to it by an unprejudiced spectator at the Court Theatre in Sloane Square, London, in 1905.

The curtain rises on Roebuck Ramsden's study in Portland Place, London, where he is opening his morning post. The period is the early 1900s, the season spring, the weather bright. Ramsden, in his early sixties, has a polished bald head, four tufts of iron-grey hair (growing above his ears and at the angles of his jaws). He wears a black frock coat, white waistcoat, 'pepper and salt' trousers (or so we must deduce from the author's stage direction to the effect that the trousers are 'neither black nor perceptibly blue, one of those indefinitely mixed hues which the modern clothier has produced to harmonize with the religions of respectable men'), and slippers. Respectability is Ramsden's hallmark: that more-than-respectable respectability which led his literary creator to describe Ramsden as one who would always rise among his fellows to the position of chairman, president, alderman, mayor. Respectability being in the 1950s no longer what it was in the 1900s, it is important to bear in mind that Respectability plays a leading part among the characters in *Man and Superman*. It has indeed, the role of an unseen but omnipresent super-character. Busts of John Bright and Herbert

Spencer stand on pillars against the wall; hanging on the wall are an engraving of Cobden, large photographs of James Martineau, Thomas Henry Huxley, and George Eliot, and prints of allegories by G. F. Watts and of Delaroche's hemicycle of the great men of all ages. In 1905 we should no doubt have recognized the likenesses of (and known about) Bright and Cobden and Martineau, whose contemporary repute has dwindled. The study is 'handsomely and solidly furnished', and its spotless appearance is due (so the author tells us) to the labours of two housemaids and a parlormaid, supervised by a vigilant housekeeper.

Before we have been able to register all this, the parlormaid enters with a visiting card and Ramsden tells her to show in the visitor. He is a handsome, almost a pretty, moustached young man in a mourning suit and with a sorrowful air. The maid announces him as Mr. Robinson, but Ramsden greets him with a warm and sympathetic handshake as Octavius. From the conversation that follows it appears that Octavius Robinson has been suddenly bereaved of the benefactor who had provided a home for him since his father's death. The benefactor's name was Whitefield and the conversation turns to Ann Whitefield, his daughter, whom Octavius has secretly wished to marry, though he hardly dares to hope that she would accept him. Ann, it appears, thinks a man incomplete without ambition, and Octavius is not ambitious. Ramsden tries to encourage the young man by saying that Ann is also wonderfully dutiful and submissive to her elders' wishes, and that if she learns that her father hoped she would marry Octavius his chances will be good.

There is, however, Ramsden goes on, one important proviso: that if Ann does marry him, Octavius must

discourage her acquaintance with his friend the author of 'The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion. By John Tanner, M.I.R.C., Member of the Idle Rich Class', which Ramsden describes as 'the most infamous, the most scandalous, the most mischievous, the most blackguardly book that ever escaped burning at the hands of the common hangman'. He adds: 'I have not read it: I would not soil my mind with such filth; but I have read what the papers say of it.' Though Ann has already told Tanner that he will always be a welcome visitor because he knew her father, Ramsden intends to put a stop to that and forbid Tanner the house if, as he expects, he finds himself appointed Ann's trustee and guardian under the father's will.

Just as Ramsden is fulminating against Tanner and at the same time declaring that he is himself a man of advanced opinions devoted to equality and liberty of conscience, the parlormaid announces that Mr. Tanner has called to see Mr. Ramsden and is in fact already in the drawing room together with Miss Ann, her mother, and Miss Robinson, Octavius's sister. That Tanner should be in such company surprises Octavius, who says, in a sentence which must have seemed unimportant on that first night but is now significant: 'He's so desperately afraid of Ann.' After first refusing to see Tanner, Ramsden changes his mind and furiously orders the parlormaid to ask him to come down.

'Mr. John Tanner suddenly opens the door and enters.'

It has been said that when Nora Helmer slammed the door as she left her husband and home in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* the noise reverberated throughout Europe. It may with no less reason be said that when John Tanner suddenly opened the door and appeared in Shaw's *Man and Superman* an invigorating wind blew through the

Western world. The author's description of Tanner's person and clothing can be passed over. Those who rate him as the outstanding character in early twentieth-century drama see him as a timeless and ageless figure.

When he first enters to confront Ramsden, Tanner's natural sense of humour is in abeyance. In a panic-stricken phase of excitement he thrusts a copy of Whitefield's will under Ramsden's nose and announces that the two of them have been appointed joint guardians of Ann. Her father changed his intention of making Ramsden sole guardian after Tanner had argued with him 'about the folly of leaving a young woman under the control of an old man with obsolete ideas'. He advocated an arrangement which would 'combine the experience of an old hand with the vitality of a young one', but overlooked the possibility that Whitefield might heed the advice and pick on Tanner to supply the vitality. Tanner sees Ann as an entirely unscrupulous young woman, with an invariable habit of justifying her own wilful conduct by fathering it on to some responsible elder whom she pretends it is her duty to obey. When Ramsden says he will refuse to act with Tanner, Tanner replies that he has himself already told Ann that he will refuse to act at all: 'but Ann keeps on saying that of course she's only an orphan; and that she cant expect the people who were glad to come to the house in her father's time to trouble much about her now. Thats the latest game. An orphan! It's like hearing an ironclad talk about being at the mercy of the wind and waves.' Ann is past-mistress of the art of emotional blackmail, which she practises with a subtle avoidance of the usual feminine contrivances. In Tanner's eyes she is the human counterpart of a boa constrictor; to Octavius she is '*the reality of romance*,

the inner good sense of nonsense, the unveiling of his eyes, the freeing of his soul, the abolition of time, place, and circumstance, the etherealization of his blood into rapturous rivers of the very water of life itself, the revelation of all the mysteries and the sanctification of all the dogmas'. To her mother she is a commonplace and rather tiresome daughter; to Shaw she is 'a well-formed creature . . . perfectly ladylike, graceful, and comely, with ensnaring eyes and hair', whose important quality is vitality: 'Vitality is as common as humanity; but, like humanity, it sometimes rises to genius; and Ann is one of the vital geniuses.'

The scene which follows Ann's entrance is excellent comedy. At the end of it Ramsden and Tanner, being no more able to handle her than to pick up quicksilver with their fingers, find themselves jockeyed into accepting the joint guardianship. 'Ramsden', cries Tanner, 'we're beaten—smashed—nonentitized, like her mother'; and to Octavius he says a few minutes later: 'Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. . . . Because they have a purpose which is not their own purpose, but that of the whole universe, a man is nothing to them but an instrument of that purpose.' This doctrine was challenged with passionate intensity for many years after *Man and Superman* promulgated it. It was considered degrading to women that they should be represented as taking the initiative in the love relationship; and equally degrading to men that they should be relegated to what seemed little better than the status of a spider reft of its entrails in the act of creation. Although the doctrine became quietly absorbed into the general current of contemporary ideas long before Shaw's death in 1950, on the stage it retained an appearance of novelty even as late as that year: for in Tyrone Guthrie's *The Top of the Ladder*, which was running in a London

theatre at the time Shaw died, a young mother is shown as completely oblivious to her husband's conversation—and, by implication, to his very existence—after the birth of her child.

But in Shaw's play that is far from being the whole story. Tanner goes on to speak of the perpetual battle between the creator-man—the artist and thinker—and the creator-woman—the mother and homemaker. The long speech (one of Shaw's best and best-known pieces of writing) during which Tanner says 'The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art' is based on Shaw's own experience, actual and instinctive: actual in so far as he had depended mainly upon his mother for support during the years in London before he established himself as a dramatic artist; instinctive in so far as he apprehended that the genuine artist is hounded by the law of his own nature to sacrifice everyone and everything to his primary function, which is to create 'new mind as surely as any woman creates new men. In the rage of that creation he is as ruthless as the woman, as dangerous to her as she to him, and as horribly fascinating. Of all human struggles there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman. . . . And it is all the deadlier because, in your romanticist cant, they love one another.' This profound human paradox has scarcely been more than adumbrated in literature so far, but it is a theme upon which a great tragedy is due to be written. Shaw dealt with it in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, but that play falls short of its sub-title 'A Tragedy' by introducing two potentially tragic themes and handling both on the level of (extremely satisfying and entertaining) argument

instead of admitting one only and treating that on the higher level which is required for tragedy.

The under-plot of *Man and Superman*—concerning the haste of the respectable people to treat Octavius's sister Violet as a shaming sinner when they learn that she is to have a child which is immediately but mistakenly assumed to be illegitimate—cannot here be more than noted as an opportunity for Tanner to attack Ramsden for his readiness to treat as a criminal the woman who has turned from trivialities 'to the fulfilment of her highest purpose and greatest function—to increase, multiply, and replenish the earth. . . .'

The highest point of this abundant first act is reached when Ann and Tanner have the stage to themselves after Ramsden and Octavius leave in a moral flurry over the Violet affair. Ann then attempts to beguile her guardian by reviving memories of their youth, but this only reminds Tanner that she lured him into a childhood compact that they should have no secrets from one another, but told him none of hers; while he either behaved mischievously so that he might have something to brag about to her or lyingly boasted of exploits that never happened. When Ann asks why he suddenly stopped confiding in her, Tanner answers: 'It happened just then that I got something that I wanted to keep all to myself instead of sharing it with you.' 'What?' 'My soul.' He explains, after Ann has accused him of talking nonsense, that he began at that stage of late boyhood to have scruples and to feel obligations; 'to find that veracity and honor were no longer goody-goody expressions in the mouths of grown-up people, but compelling principle in myself'. Then come two passages describing an interior change which had been as vital in Shaw's own adolescent experience as in

Tanner's, a change which, unlike most experiences in adolescence—that unstable phase of individual development—was permanent in Shaw. Tanner says: 'the change that came to me was the birth in me of moral passion; and I declare that according to my experience moral passion is the only real passion. . . . Is the devil to have all the passions as well as all the good tunes? If [our moral sense] were not a passion—if it were not the mightiest of the passions, all the other passions would sweep it away like a leaf before a hurricane. It is the birth of that passion that turns a child into a man.'

Tanner's endeavour to keep this conversation with Ann on the philosophic plane fails to distract her from her purpose of drawing him into her toils. He is at one and the same time repelled and fascinated. When he cries, almost in despair: 'I never feel safe with you: there is a devilish charm—or no: not a charm, a subtle interest . . .' she laughs in triumph but, as always, evades moral responsibility for attracting him, this time by calling him a flirt. Though Ann has one dominant purpose, she is as various as Shakespeare's Cleopatra and is a live figure on the stage as well as being Shaw's embodiment of the cosmic (or, it may be, the eternal) Feminine Principle. For years women in general detested Ann; many do so still; some in every generation will continue to detest her—or, rather, to detest Shaw who created her. Through her he tears away the veil of the temple of female mystery.

Ann is able to call up all the wiles that most men find irresistible in a woman—for this her fellow women can forgive her with no more than a token show of hesitation: in that particular she plays the game according to the traditional romantic rules governing the worldwide freemasonry of civilized womanhood. Her heinous and

scarcely forgivable offence in some women's eyes is, however, that if she cannot gain her end by keeping the rules, she ignores the rules. Her ordained function is to be a mother—and for Ann, as a 'perfectly ladylike' young woman, that means becoming a wife; but not simply a wife, nor even the wife of Octavius who adores and at length proposes to her. As a young woman who is not only perfectly ladylike but also the human channel of the evolutionary progress towards a higher creation, she has willy nilly to impose herself as wife upon the one man to whom her instinct (Shaw as we shall see, had another name for it) drives her as the sole fit instrument of her destiny.

It is not enough to say, as was so often said in the early stages of his career as a playwright, that Shaw portrayed woman as the huntress (instead of, romantically, as the quarry) in the love-chase. His case was that, under the law of the universe, woman has a vital function to perform: the function of getting the next—and not merely the *next* but also a *better*—generation born. If a woman neglect to carry out that function because of conventional modesty, or through subservience to any shifts and evasions of social observance, she will have failed. She may preserve modesty, respectability, self-esteem; she may divert her energies into some 'socially valuable' labour; she may be frustrated by circumstances which render her blameless; nevertheless she will have failed the next generation.¹ Ann—or some power in Ann stronger than herself—is determined that *she* shall not fail the next generation;

¹ Shaw explained their own childlessness by saying that 'an author's children . . . were his books', and that 'his wife had "quite trouble enough nursing him through his confinements without having any of her own".' It is to be noted, however, that his wife described babies as 'disgusting little things'. (See Blanche Patch: *30 Years with G.B.S.*, 1951, pp. 10, 17.)

so, he being her ordained mate, Tanner's frenzy to escape her must be overborne. The man's desire to create new thought is vain and barren unless it be conjoined to the woman's task of creating new thinkers.

Whereas in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* Shaw had presented the New Woman in the character of Vivie, in Ann Whitefield he re-presents the Old Woman: the one is a modern product thrown up by social stresses, the other belongs to Nature and all the ages.

Act II of *Man and Superman* introduces another modern social phenomenon, the New Man. Henry Straker, Tanner's chauffeur, has lost his novelty as a stage character only because the earth now teems with Strakers. They are the men who have cast off the deferential manner of the nineteenth-century 'workman' and adopted some measure of the proletarian class-consciousness with which the present-day 'worker' has been indoctrinated. But though Straker is no longer novel, he remains an original and holds a prominent place in the Shaw gallery. His interests are technical, not political; but, as Tanner tells Octavius, Straker is 'swollen with the pride of class' and is more of an intellectual snob about his Board School and Polytechnic education than an upper-class youth would be about Eton and Oxford. 'Very nice sort of place, Oxford,' responds Straker, 'for people that like that sort of place. They teach you to be a gentleman there. In the polytechnic they teach you to be an engineer or such like. See?' Tanner interprets this observation as a sarcastic indication of Straker's snobbish contempt for gentlemen and his arrogant pride in being an engineer.

In this second act Ann, having rejected Octavius (off stage), takes seriously Tanner's purely rhetorical invitation to join him in a motor tour, and Act III finds the

party amongst brigands in the Sierra Nevada. Earlier, Ann rebuts Tanner's ironical suggestion that now he has become her guardian it would be more fitting if she addressed him as Mr. Tanner than as Jack by threatening to call him Don Juan, and when Tanner lies down to sleep in the bandits' camp he dreams the famous *Don Juan in Hell* scene. Among the many conversation pieces in Shaw's plays this is supreme. In sustained brilliance of argument, in paradox and wit and humour, it is unsurpassed in dramatic literature. Yet these are no more than its raw materials.

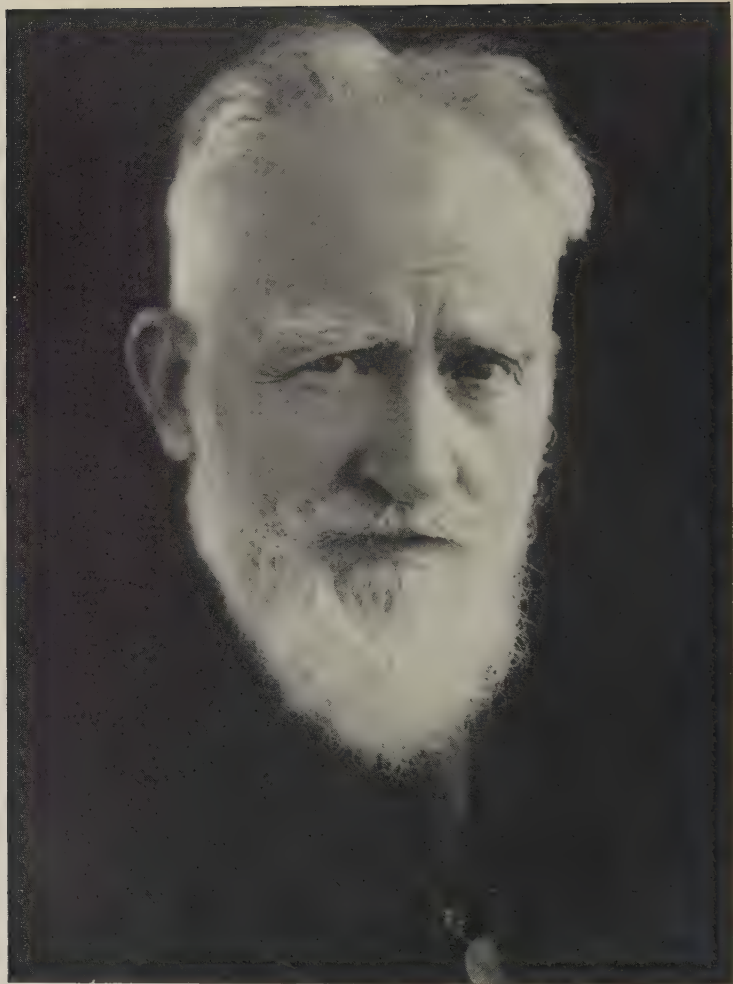
Passages of Mozart's music bridge the gap between the actual and the dream state as the scene begins, and great chords roll out later. This is significant, for in this one-and-a-half hour *tour de force* of actionless discussion between four static characters, Shaw holds the audience's attention with what is nothing less than a verbal *composition*: i.e. a piece of sustained verbal music, a literary oratorio rendered by tenor (Don Juan), baritone (The Devil), bass (The Statue), and soprano (Ana). It is possible to imagine that an enraptured listener on being asked, after a first hearing, what it all means, might reply: 'I don't know; but it sounded magnificent.' This must not be misunderstood. The discussion *means* a great deal, and what it means is expressed with perfect clarity. There is no obscurity, though every speech is loaded with matter, and the whole needs to be heard and read again and again before it can be completely assimilated by the intellect—as the Ninth Symphony, for example, needs to be heard repeatedly if it is to be 'understood' intellectually and appreciated technically. But the superiority of works of art over man's other works is that they offer opportunities of immediate apprehension as distinct from (though mostly not to the

exclusion of) the slower and lower process of rational comprehension. A more sophisticated yet equally enraptured listener to *Don Juan in Hell* would not say 'I don't know what it means', though he might say 'I can't explain what it means until I have read the whole thing carefully and analysed the speeches.' The justification of a work of art is that it *communicates* its 'meaning' (or significance, or whatever other word may be chosen to suggest in rational form a supra-rational process); a work of art establishes direct and instantaneous communication with its audience, and the audience, so to say, 'experiences an experience' which it may find impossible to analyse or explain or describe.

This digression is relevant to the Hell scene in *Man and Superman*, not because the argument therein is insusceptible to rational analysis but because any such analysis or purely intellectual examination can only be a roundabout earthbound stumbling towards a mark that has already been reached by supra-intellectual communication. The scene is a work of art—of verbal-musical art—as well as an intellectual discussion; and as a work of art it is unique. An intellectual discussion on the several themes treated in the scene might conceivably have been written by any highly intelligent playwright, but Shaw alone had the ability to lift metaphysical argument to the plane of musical art and to do so without sacrificing common sense or humour. His music here is symphonic not lyrical. While it would be possible to quote illustrative passages—e.g., Don Juan's speeches beginning: 'Then you must stay here; for hell is the home of the unreal . . .', 'In the heaven I seek, no other joy. . . .', 'Commander: I do not mean the military man. . . .', 'Bah! what need I add? . . .', 'Pooh! why should I be civil to them or to you? . . .' (the



*Man and
Superman
1951*



twenty-seven antithetical phrases in this speech test the technical skill of a speaker as an elaborate cadenza tests that of a singer); The Devil's, beginning 'And is Man any the less destroying himself . . .'; etc.—to give them in isolation would be to give a false impression. The scene must be *heard* as a whole. If it cannot be heard in a theatre it should be read aloud; the words themselves 'carry' the reader's voice and create their own harmonies.

Moreover, the themes are introduced as in a musical composition. It would not be difficult to write 'programme notes' on the scene, using the technical terminology of music criticism to describe the introduction of 'first subject' (sin), 'second subject' (heaven and hell), and so on, with disquisitions on thematic material, development, recapitulation, and so forth. What must be stressed most emphatically, however, is that notwithstanding its preoccupation with manifold serious topics, the scene provides grand entertainment throughout. It is so extraordinarily exhilarating that it must have revealed to many for the first time in their lives that thinking is great fun. .

No attempt to say what *Don Juan in Hell* is 'about' could amount to more than a dull paraphrase, as discouraging as it would be to attempt a one-finger piano-forte version of a symphony. Intent here, as elsewhere, to give a fair hearing to all parties in a debate, Shaw allows The Devil a point of view and lends him a most eloquent tongue to express his devilish pessimism in opposition to Don Juan. The Devil's diagnosis of the state of the world in the speech (900 words long) beginning 'And is Man any the less destroying himself for all this boasted brain of his?' appears incontrovertible if taken out of its context. But Juan is not dismayed by The Devil's concentration on grim fact. His concern is

with what man and the world could be and, for their salvation, must be; not with man and the world as they are at their present worst. The Devil's is a philosophy of death and damnation, propounding that mankind is so bad that nothing can save it from willing its own destruction. To this Don Juan's reply is that the Life Force (Shaw's rationalizing term for what in Ann Whitefield appears as mere progenitive instinct) works in man to save him from 'the forces of Death and Degeneration': 'Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organizing itself; . . . the mammoth and the man, the mouse and the megatherium, the flies and the fleas and the Fathers of the Church, are all more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly self-conscious; in short, a god.' Our task, in Juan's philosophy, is to cooperate in 'the work of helping Life in its struggle upward'. The philosopher's brain, he asserts, is the special instrument evolved by the Life Force to serve and operate its purpose of producing a more efficient and a nobler creature than man now is. Woman's energy is drained by 'the exhausting labor of gestation'; while man's energy, of which only an infinitesimal fraction is expended in procreation, is available for the imaginative and mental activities which produced civilization and which animate Juan to declare: '. . . as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding.' ' ". . . And this" says

the Life Force to the philosopher "must thou strive to do for me until thou diest, when I will make another brain and another philosopher to carry on the work." '

Doña Ana's final cry comes after Juan has proceeded towards heaven, and as she herself vanishes into the void: 'I believe in the Life to Come. A father! a father for the Superman!' In the last act of *Man and Superman* Tanner, in the grip of the Life Force, finds himself impelled irresistibly into the arms of Ann Whitefield. The lighthearted humour in this act rounds off the play with which Bernard Shaw established in English drama a new genre—the Comedy of Purpose—and demonstrated that it could be as entertaining as the Comedy of Manners, and incomparably more satisfying to the metaphysical appetite.

Chapter Seven

JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND TO THE SHEWING-UP OF BLANCO POSNET: 1904-1909

John Bull's Other Island (1904); *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904); *Major Barbara* (1905); *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906); *Getting Married* (1908); *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909)

WHEN the Vedrenne-Barker repertory season at the Court Theatre began on 18 October 1904, Bernard Shaw was still looked upon as an *enfant terrible* using the stage as a playpen for his puppets and dolls. By the time the season ended, on 29 June 1907, he was an established playwright with a score of 701 performances of eleven plays during that season, compared with a next best of forty-eight performances (of *Prunella* by Laurence Housman and Granville Barker). *Man and Superman* was played 176 times and *You Never Can Tell* 149 times. But *John Bull's Other Island*, though performed only 121 times, became the corner-stone of Shaw's success in the theatre. The fact that this was announced on the programme as 'a new and unpublished play' shows that Shaw's systematic publication of his dramatic works was bearing fruit in the building up of a reading public to whom the performance of a play not yet available in print could be advertised as an event.

Under the repertory system adopted at the Court Theatre no play was allowed a continuous indefinite

run, and after six performances in November *John Bull's Other Island* did not appear again until 7 February, for the first of ten further performances. It was during this second period that Edward VII attended (on 11 March 1905) a Command Performance of the play. Since that time royal visits to the theatre have become much more frequent and have almost entirely ceased to rank as State occasions setting a golden seal upon a particular play; but in 1905 Edward, with his immense social prestige, could bring the aristocracy and the many others who followed in their train to support a play they would otherwise have ignored. At first thought it appears ironical that material success should flow from royal patronage to one who at that time must have seemed an arch-republican; yet Shaw was in fact the architect of his own good fortune by compelling attention from so improbable a quarter. That, indeed, was his peculiar strength—that he could and did compel attention from all quarters. You might detest the fellow, but you could not ignore him unless you were either a hermit or an imbecile. If you were a politician, a Christian, a doctor, a philosopher, a husband, a wife, a parent, you were compelled to defend your particular citadel against the attacks of this infidel, or else you were compelled to acknowledge that the infidel was no infidel at all but a true believer who must be hearkened to and followed. If you were none of these, but merely a son or a daughter and a thinking person, you were nevertheless challenged on the ground of your sonship or your daughtership and compelled to consider your position *vis-à-vis* your parents. If you shut your doors upon the fellow, he was in at the window; if you barred the windows too, he was in at the keyhole; if you also stuffed the keyholes he was down the chimney.

Never had there been so ubiquitous a writer as Shaw proved to be in the six plays at the head of this chapter.

When he dealt with 'a subject', moreover, the subject became as wide and deep as humanity, with the result that life came pouring in. In *John Bull's Other Island*, where politics is the subject and Home Rule the core of the subject, it is not what politics could make of men that becomes the real issue, but what men have made of politics. The former peasants in the play who have acquired their patches of earth under the Land Purchase scheme and still nurse the memory of Ireland's exploitation by the English, are bitterly antagonistic to Larry Doyle who wishes to extend land-ownership to those still landless and to prevent the possibility of the exploitation of Irishmen by other Irishmen. He dares to tell them that whereas the English landlord, educated and travelled, was too high above the mere labourer to be jealous of him, they, who 'are only one little step above him, would die sooner than let him come up that step'. This plain speaking convinces them that Larry was right in saying that his strong opinions wouldn't suit them, when they proposed to nominate him as their parliamentary candidate; but they are only too ready to listen to the sentimental claptrap of the Englishman, Broadbent, who befuddles them with his outpourings of the stale political jargon of one who calls himself a Gladstonian Liberal Home Ruler, though his only interest in Rosscullen and its people is to grant them loans which they cannot repay. He will then be able to foreclose on their mortgages and plant a golf links and luxury hotel on land which should bear food. Keegan, the ex-priest who remains a visionary of the St. Francis breed, hails Broadbent ironically as 'the conquering Englishman':

'when I come here in the evenings to meditate on my madness; to watch the shadow of the Round Tower lengthening in the sunset; to break my heart uselessly in the curtained gloaming over the dead heart and blinded soul of the island of the saints, you will comfort me with the bustle of a great hotel, and the sight of the little children carrying the golf clubs of your tourists as a preparation for the life to come'.

The Anglo-Irish political scene has changed beyond present recognition since *John Bull's Other Island* was written, and of all his plays this would now be the stalest if Shaw had been no more than a topical writer with current politics as his main concern. But he saw beyond the temporary to the permanent, beyond the particular political or social problem to the men and women whose lives and souls are affected by the wisdom or the stupidity of the problem-mongers who call themselves politicians, and his plays therefore have the duration and the span of humanity, not merely that of some concern which, however important today, is insignificant in the eye of eternity. *John Bull's Other Island* will continue to interest so long as there are men like Broadbent who combine sentimentality and cupidity, and other men, like Keegan, to whom the life to come seems more important than this world of getting and spending. It will continue to interest, also, so long as the climate of Ireland produces Larry Doyles who both love and dread their country: 'those white spring roads . . . those misty rushes and brown bogs . . . those hill-sides of granite rocks and magenta heather. You've no such colors in the sky [Doyle says to Broadbent], no such lure in the distances, no such sadness in the evenings. Oh, the dreaming! the dreaming! the torturing, heartscalding, never satisfying dreaming, dreaming,

dreaming, dreaming. An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him; . . .'

Written for the American actor, Arnold Daly (who performed it in New York in the same bill as *The Man of Destiny* and afterwards as a vaudeville piece) *How He Lied to Her Husband* is too neat and skilful to be written-off hurriedly as a farcical frolic. It is, as Shaw pointed out, an example of how a moribund stage cliché—'the eternal triangle'—can be revived by looking at it from a new angle. In this playlet Shaw pokes fun at his own *Candida* by taking a similar situation in its bare essentials and standing it on its head, so that whereas sympathy was evoked for the lovelorn young poet Eugene Marchbanks, his counterpart, Henry Apjohn, is presented in terms of absurdity. Aurora Bompas, rightly suspecting that Henry's poems to her have been filched by her sister-in-law Georgina and delivered to the 'wronged' husband, has no such notion as *Candida*'s of weighing the needs of the two men. To Henry's romantic notion that they shall proclaim the truth to the husband and then walk out 'without concealment and subterfuge . . . in full honor and self-respect', she opposes a barrage of unromantic determination to put an end to this 'flapdoodle' and brings him down to earth: '. . . I tell you, Henry Apjohn, that y o u got me into this mess; and y o u must get me out of it again.' When at her instigation he tells the husband a face-saving lie, professing that the poems were written years before to Aurora the rosy-fingered dawn and that his 'relations with Mrs. Bompas are relations of perfect coldness—of indifference—' Teddy Bompas is violently indignant that his wife should not be properly appre-

ciated, and the two become involved in a physical rough-and-tumble. Angered by a bump on his head, Henry admits that he did write the poems to her. Bompas is delighted and proposes to print them, 'finest paper, sumptuous binding, everything first class.' There is no case for withholding admiration from a farcical trifle if it is good within its prescribed limits, as *How He Lied to Her Husband* is. Technically it could not be bettered: the situation is ingeniously contrived and firmly controlled; the dialogue comes trippingly from the players' tongues; the characters are not so exaggerated as to become distorted caricatures; the humour is lambent, refreshing, and wholesome. As a display of Shaw's comic sense working independently of the social sense with which it was elsewhere almost invariably coupled, the playlet is admirable.

If versatility is meritorious, credit must be given to Bernard Shaw for the ease with which he could pass from first-rate clowning with Apjohn and the Bompases to first-rate preaching and moralizing with the Under-shafts and their heterogeneous circle in *Major Barbara*. However repetitious it may be to harp upon the point, it is important to stress that Shaw's unquenchable sense of fun was of priceless value in rescuing preaching and moralizing from the dreary disrepute into which it had been plunged by numberless Victorian sermonizers. No finer sermon than *Major Barbara* has ever been preached; no play ever written is more deserving of respect, none holds the attention more readily and continuously, none is more entertaining. *Major Barbara* is one of the several plays by Shaw of which a future critic would be compelled to say, if it were recovered from the ruins of our civilization as the only surviving work

of an unidentified author, 'This is a great play by a great and good man.'

Among the religious Shaw was regarded for most of his life as irreligious; and around 1905, when *Major Barbara* was written, the orthodox would have described him, by the title of his own play, as devil's disciple, notwithstanding his exposure of The Devil in *Man and Superman*. They could not, therefore, have been prepared for him to take the Salvation Army seriously, as he did in *Major Barbara*. Although a quarter of a century had gone by since William Booth founded it in 1878, the Salvation Army was still cold-shouldered by the respectable and derided by the impious. The several church- and chapel-going denominations looked askance at what appeared to them to be a regrettable want of decorum in its meetings. The tambourines and concertinas, the cornets and drums, the flags with the blood-and-fire motto, the jaunty hymn-tunes, the converts' uninhibited public confessions of past misdeeds, the handclapping as a rhythmical ground-bass to the singing, the begging for pennies, the shouts of 'Glory hallelujah!', the marching and countermarching—all seemed blatant and vulgar to those who took it for granted that religion and respectability were inseparable, and indeed, identical. To hooligans and drunks and mischievous children of the streets, the Salvation Army open-air meetings were still fair game for ribaldry and horse-play.

At the end of the 1890s the Salvation Army had been introduced into a long-remembered American musical comedy, *The Belle of New York*, but it is to *Major Barbara* that one must look for the apotheosis of Booth's organization. Shaw's was the first influential voice outside its own ranks to declare that the Salvation Army

had restored joy to religion and proclaimed a triumphant faith which must be cried aloud in ecstatic phrases, not murmured and muttered in set terms. Yet any cause that Shaw championed had reason to tremble even while it rejoiced, for he was always an unillusioned witness who could rebuke severely as well as praise warmly.

Barbara Undershaft, the elder daughter of Andrew Undershaft the munitions magnate and his wife Lady Britomart (daughter of the Earl of Stevenage), turns her back on the possibility of a brilliant marriage and joins the Salvation Army out of love for the common people. Undershaft is another of those Shavian fathers who have been long separated from their families. In this instance the break-up of the home was caused partly by Undershaft's determination to follow the tradition of the original founder of the munitions firm that the succession must pass to a foundling, and partly because (as Lady Britomart tells Stephen, her son) Undershaft 'didn't exactly do wrong things: he said them and thought them; that was what was so dreadful. He really had a sort of religion of wrongness. Just as one doesn't mind men practising immorality so long as they own that they are in the wrong by preaching morality; so I couldn't forgive Andrew for preaching immorality while he practised morality. . . .' But now that the children are grown up and her own financial means inadequate, their mother is compelled to summon Undershaft back, with the consequence (which his wife did not foresee) that he preaches his 'religion of wrongness' against Barbara's religion.

Barbara's confidence is first shaken when, after she has refused to take twopence offered by her father to make up to five shillings the collection at an outdoor

meeting, her superior officer, Commissioner Mrs. Baines, accepts from him a cheque for £5,000 to complete the fund for maintaining Salvation Army shelters for the hungry and homeless. To Mrs. Baines this is a desirable diversion of money from the destructive work of Satan to the saving work of God, but Barbara regards it as selling the Army to the devil; and in agony of spirit she discards her army uniform. But when she visits her father's munitions works the next day in company with her family and Adolphus Cusins, the professor of Greek whom she is to marry, Barbara becomes convinced that evil cannot be cured by turning her back upon any side of life: 'There is no wicked side: life is all one.' She sees that there is a greater task for her spiritual fervour among the well-paid and well-fed munition workers than among the down-and-outs in the slum shelter who are ready to profess conversion out of 'gratitude for a scrap of bread and treacle'. Here, among the unbribable, 'is where salvation is really wanted. My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread.' Then comes Barbara's great cry, which is also one of the key passages in Shaw's work: 'I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women. . . .' This concept of men and women as instruments—active and joyous instruments—of the divine purpose is central in Shaw's philosophy. He advocated it not in the language of conventional piety but through clashing argument between well-matched adversaries.

The ample light relief in *Major Barbara* makes it an enjoyable comedy, but its permanent importance is in

the magnificent discussion involving Undershaft, Cusins, and Barbara. Outside these scenes there are other wise, witty, and bitingly ironical observations: as, for example, when Undershaft's priggish young son, Stephen, having enumerated the professions he is unqualified to enter, is asked by his father, '. . . is there a n y t h i n g you know or care for?' Stephen says: 'I know the difference between right and wrong', and Undershaft, '*hugely tickled*', replies: 'You dont say so! What! no capacity for business, no knowledge of law, no sympathy with art, no pretension to philosophy; only a simple knowledge of the secret that has puzzled all the philosophers, baffled all the lawyers, muddled all the men of business, and ruined most of the artists: the secret of right and wrong. My, man, youre a genius, a master of masters, a god! At twenty-four, too!'

If an opinion had to be given as to the scene in which Shaw's special gifts as a playwright are displayed most brilliantly and most satisfyingly, nothing better than the first act of *The Doctor's Dilemma* could be named. It takes up more than a third of the playing time of the five-act 'tragedy', and is almost wholly a discussion of professional topics by six doctors and surgeons. Yet it is continuously absorbing to lay audiences; it is deeply serious, gloriously funny, and always human from the moment the curtain goes up on old Emmy dusting the consulting room (off Portland Place) of Sir Colenso Ridgeon whose knighthood has that day been announced in the King's Birthday Honours list; and it is also emotionally moving in the passages where Blenkinsop the sick and penniless general practitioner speaks.

Each of the six men is clearly differentiated as an individual person, even though each stands for a particu-

lar principle—or else a particular fad—in the treatment of patients. Schutzmacher, the likeable prosperous Jew, found success in a midland manufacturing town, where he lettered his surgery window ‘Advice and medicine sixpence. Cure Guaranteed’, and administered bottles of Parrish’s Chemical Food together with sensible words. The new knight, Ridgdon, has devised a technique of inoculation against tuberculosis and other diseases, which depends upon ascertaining when the patient’s ‘opsonin index’ is in the positive phase. Cutler Walpole proceeds on the assumption that 95 per cent. of the human race suffers from chronic blood-poisoning due to the lodgement of undigested food and waste products in the ‘nuciform sac’, and that the only remedy is to cut out the sac. But Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington—who radiates such enormous self-satisfaction that he cheers, reassures, and heals his patients ‘by the mere incompatibility of disease or anxiety with his welcome presence’—holds that every ill can be cured by injecting a suitable anti-toxin: ‘There are only two rules for anti-toxins. First don’t be afraid of them; second, inject them a quarter of an hour before meals, three times a day.’ The seventy-year-old Sir Patrick Cullen deflates these enthusiastic innovators by saying that modern science is a wonderful thing, but that their discoveries lead back to the ideas of his father who has been dead forty years. ‘Most discoveries’, he remarks, ‘are made regularly every fifteen years.’

Sir Patrick, as well as being the voice of plain sense, is also the voice of conscience; for when in the second act Ridgdon hesitates to decide whether the last of the only ten patients he has accommodation for shall be poor worthy Blenkinsop or Louis Dubedat the brilliant young artist who is a bigamist and a swindler, the old man asks:

'Well, Mr. Savior of Lives: which is it to be? that honest decent man Blenkinsop, or that rotten blackguard of an artist, eh?' The dilemma which faces Ridgeon is fined down to a bare choice between Honesty and Genius, since Blenkinsop lacks genius and Dubedat lacks honesty.

The Doctor's Dilemma, notwithstanding its great first act and an effective second act, falls away sharply afterwards because of Shaw's inability to convince us that Dubedat possesses genius; inability which no doubt arose from what must have been the refusal of Shaw's moral sense to concede that Art could in any circumstances take precedence of Virtue. But even if that obstacle had not existed, it is improbable that Dubedat would have been a convincing character, for geniuses in plays and novels must always be taken on trust; we have nothing but the author's word to support the claim. Dubedat is one of Shaw's few major failures, since he is equally unconvincing as a scoundrel. His only genuinely impressive moment is his last, when he dies with this creed on his lips: 'I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen.' Yet even here a doubt arises. Though the voice be Dubedat's the words do not fit the character as presented; they are, in fact, partly borrowed—from a story by Wagner.

However thoroughly he failed with his portrait of an artist, Shaw was himself too conscientious an artist to permit prejudice to distort his drawing of the doctors' characters. He crusaded for years against the doctrine of medical infallibility and opposed tendencies which appeared to him to lead in the direction of scientific

witchcraft. But though he earned much illwill from the medical profession by his sceptical attitude, and though *The Doctor's Dilemma* mocks the specialists' jargon and fads, his works contain no characters more likeable than the doctors and surgeons in this play.

Some of Shaw's best prose passages are more or less hidden away in the descriptive stage-directions with which the plays are interspersed and which serve as a running commentary for the reader. Nothing was so remarkable in Shaw as the sheer amplitude of his mind. It found room for an amazing variety and abundance of material which gives his work such brimming richness that it seems at times as prodigal as Nature herself. If, however, there is Nature's prodigality, there is never Nature's untidiness. In his later years Shaw appears sometimes to have grown tired of the play he was writing and abandoned it with a loose end, but so long as his attention was sustained all was orderly, let his interest range wherever it might. One of his best prose miniatures is in the two preliminary pages which describe the stage setting for *Getting Married*: they are an admirable verbal picture of the Norman kitchen in the palace of the Bishop of Chelsea, and at the same time as they depict the scene they also hint at the character and circumstances of the bishop. *Getting Married* has not taken a high place in the Shavian canon, but its opening is one of Shaw's most enchanting scenes. Collins the greengrocer-alderman who is always imported to superintend the wedding breakfast as each of the bishop's six daughters marries, is a repository of horse sense and homely wisdom, while the bishop's excellent wife is the model interlocutor, saying just enough in just the right way to draw him out. This

conversation piece dances and twinkles with humour and good temper and friendliness, yet it also has touches of bland malice to save it from over sweetness and insipidity. Mrs. Bridgenorth has said that marriage came natural to her and that she would have thought it did to Collins too. He replies, pensively: 'No, maam: it didnt come natural. My wife had to break me in to it. It came natural to her: she's what you might call a regular old hen. Always wants to have her family within sight of her. Wouldnt go to bed unless she knew they was all safe at home and the door locked, and the lights out. Always wants her luggage in the carriage with her. Always goes and makes the engine driver promise her to be careful. She's a born wife and mother, maam. . . .' A charming picture of an ideal wife for a greengrocer and an ideal mother for a greengrocer's family—but that is not the end of the speech; the sting is in the tail: '. . . She's a born wife and mother, maam. Thats why my children all ran away from home.'

As a dramatic discourse on English marriage laws and customs and their ramifications, their absurdities, illogicalities, and injustices—and even their immoralities where divorce is concerned—*Getting Married* is a lively piece. Its real merit, however, is more in the characters than in the thesis, and this is not to its disadvantage. The most remarkable figure is Collins's sister-in-law, the wife of his brother George. Mrs. George appears, as the Mayoress, in the later part of the play and is described as '*a remarkably well-preserved woman. But her beauty is wrecked, like an ageless landscape ravaged by long and fierce war.*' Collins has spoken of her earlier as a woman much addicted to love and running away from her husband, and as a clairvoyant easily mesmerized and given to saying wonderful things when she goes into a

trance. She falls into a state of ecstasy in the presence of the Bishop and his chaplain and delivers herself of ecstatic utterances which leave the two ecclesiastics in doubt as to whether she is a saint or a woman possessed of a devil. She is, as a character in the play, impressive but inexplicable. Another of the men suggests that her ecstasy may be neither saintly nor demonic but 'the convulsion of the Pythoness on the tripod'. In the aura of the ancient mysteries she remains, though typifying, conceivably, a prophetic element in Shaw's own nature which he was not always able to keep under rational control, and which re-appears in Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House* and in Lilith's final speech at the end of *Back to Methuselah*.

In contrast to *Getting Married*, where the characters dominate the argument, *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* is a thesis play pure and simple. The sub-title describes it as 'A Sermon in Crude Melodrama' and the first sentence of the Preface as 'a religious tract in dramatic form'. It is as powerful a religious sermon as any that Bernard Shaw delivered, but this did not deter the Lord Chamberlain from prohibiting its performance on the ground that it was blasphemous, though the acute religious sense of Irish audiences found nothing to object to when it was performed in Dublin in August 1909.

The purport of *Blanco Posnet* is virtually identical with that of Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven* and of John Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy*. Blanco, a black-guard accused of horse-stealing and brought to trial in a courthouse 'in a territory of the United States of America', would have got away on the horse if he had not met a woman carrying a child who was dying of croup. Though Blanco had no bowels of compassion,

some power he entirely failed to understand yet could not resist took hold of him and made him do a good deed against his own will. He gave up the horse to the woman so that she could get the child to a doctor, and he himself was arrested on foot. At his trial he abuses witnesses, jury, sheriff, and all in court; but the intervention of the child's mother saves his neck. When he is discharged he insists on preaching a sermon in the courthouse before he leaves. In his own crude language he describes how he started out to be a 'bad man' because he thought the Christianity they tried to teach him in boyhood was snivelling cant. But he found that he was playing what he calls a rotten game and that the game played on him when he tried to save the child was very different. 'What's this game that upsets our game? For seems to me theres two games bein played. Our game is a rotten game that makes me feel I'm dirt and that you're all as rotten dirt as me. T'other game may be a silly game; but it aint rotten.' When Blanco wonders why the Lord made the croup, he decides that it was a matter of trial and error; that something went wrong on the Creator's hands and that He then made men to fight the wrong. 'You bet He didnt make us for nothing; and He wouldn't have made us at all if He could have done His work without us. By Gum, that must be what we're for! . . . He made me because he had a job for me. He let me run loose til the job was ready; and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging. And I tell you it didnt feel rotten: . . . I got the rotten feeling off me for a minute of my life; and I'll go through fire to get it off me again. . . .'

If any single message can be isolated from the complex body of Shaw's work it is that the Divine Will (or the Life Force) must be served, and that mankind was

created to serve it. Sometimes a man is caught up suddenly as Blanco was, violently—or as Dick Dudgeon was, somewhat less melodramatically, in *The Devil's Disciple*. The experience is identical with spiritual conversion—the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus, the experience of John Wesley in the Aldersgate Street meeting-house. To John Tanner in *Man and Superman* the experience came in boyhood as the birth of what he called moral passion. To Major Barbara it came at her father's munitions works when it was borne in upon her that God's work must be done for no other reason than that it *is* God's work, and that neither the provision of bread for the deserving poor nor the hope of heaven for the deserving penitent has any relevance to it: 'When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank.' Cusins inquires, 'Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?' and Barbara answers: 'Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of the Shadow.'

Chapter Eight

MISALLIANCE TO PYGMALION: 1910-1913

Misalliance (1910); *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910); *Fanny's First Play* (1911); *Androcles and the Lion* (1912); *Overruled* (1912); *Pygmalion* (1913)

THE historic Vedrenne-Barker season at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907 gave impetus to the repertory movement, and encouraged Charles Frohman, the Anglo-American impresario, to organize a repertory season at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1909-10, during which he staged (among lesser plays) J. M. Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, Granville Barker's *The Madras House*, and Bernard Shaw's *Misalliance*. The venture was only moderately successful in terms of dramatic and artistic merit, and was financially a failure.

Misalliance is certainly the worst full-length play Shaw had written up to that time, and one of the very few by him that are tedious to read. Its 90-page Preface is on Parents and Children, and presumably that is also the intended subject of the play, though the play has no discoverable core or point and is not mentioned in the Preface. The scene is the home at Hindhead in Surrey of John Tarleton, prosperous manufacturer of Tarleton's Underwear. His daughter Hypatia is engaged to Bentley Summerhays, an effete youth who, with his father, Lord Summerhays, a retired colonial governor, is on a weekend visit to the Tarletons. The opening

minutes are taken up with bickering and stupid backchat between Bentley and Hypatia's brother Johnny. When young Tarleton loses his temper and threatens to give Bentley a good hiding, the latter throws himself on the ground and yells until Mrs. Tarleton and Hypatia rush in to fuss over him and scold Johnny. The women take Bentley away, leaving Johnny in a rage, which is relieved when Lord Summerhays enters and hands him a punch-bowl from the sideboard to smash. Summerhays having agreed that his son is an infuriating young man, the conversation turns to Johnny's father, who is away opening one of the free libraries which he has a passion for presenting to the public.

The occasional lapses of a man of genius hold a peculiar and puzzling fascination. Any reader who pores over *Misalliance* may well ask why Shaw retained this play among his collected works. But since it *was* retained, it is legitimate to comment briefly on certain characteristics which recur from place to place in Shaw's work and which in *Misalliance* are obtrusive faults. He had always a praiseworthy dread of dull solemnity and was constantly on the watch to safeguard his own writings from it. In his plays, at least, he feared that seriousness, if sustained over-long, would decline into ponderosity, and his deliberate preventive device was to take sudden dives into flippancy. This was a minor variant of the device of anti-climax which is used with striking effect in situations of dramatic importance—as, for example, in Act I of *Man and Superman*, where Tanner's high-minded championship of Violet against the censorious respectable moralists is ludicrously collapsed when he learns from her that she is a respectable wife, and not, as he too had hastily assumed, an unmarried expectant mother.

In *Misalliance* Shaw's flippancy betrays him into puerility—as when Bentley remarks that John Tarleton likes to refer to himself as Plain John; but, he goes on, 'you cant call him that in his own office: besides it doesnt suit him! it's not flamboyant enough', and Johnny, though a reasonably intelligent young man, is made to ask, 'Flam what?' A little later, in conversation with Hypatia, Mrs. Tarleton gives an account of a committee at which she met several women of title who settled to a discussion of drainage systems. 'I sat there with my cheeks burning until one of the duchesses, thinking I looked out of it, I suppose, asked me what system I had. I said I was sure I knew nothing about such things, and hadnt we better change the subject.' Another of the duchesses 'began talking about what sour milk did in her inside. . . . And me listening to her, that had never dared to think that a duchess could have anything so common as an inside!' Though the period is the 1900s, it is incredible that a sensible mother of a family would even then have talked with such squeamish false modesty.

A trick of humour which Shaw took over from Dickens is the attachment of catch-phrases to particular characters. In Dickens: 'I'll eat my hat', 'Waiting for something to turn up', 'King Charles's head', and many more. In Shaw: Saranoff's 'I never apologise' (*Arms and the Man*); The Waiter's 'You never can tell, sir: you never can tell', and Bohun's 'you think you won't; but you will' and its similitudes (*You Never Can Tell*); B.B.'s 'stimulate the phagocytes' (*The Doctor's Dilemma*); Captain Shotover's 'the seventh degree of concentration' (*Heartbreak House*); and in *Misalliance* John Tarleton's 'Read Ibsen', 'Read Dickens', and so on, in such remarks as 'Children: dont squabble. Read Dr.

Watts. . . .' Used judiciously this label-humour, as it may be called, rarely fails to amuse, though it becomes unendurably tiresome if overdone. Its popularity with all classes could possibly be traced to roots in folklore that would link it with proverbs and other gnomic phrases.

The Tarleton's week-end party in *Misalliance* is curiously invaded by two aviators who descend upon the house, and by an intruder on foot (the son of one of Tarleton's past mistresses) who adds another irrelevance to the already irrelevant gathering. One of the aviators, a Polish woman acrobat, Lina Szczepanowska, though she is as irrelevant as the rest of the company, brings a gust of life into the play and even into its male characters, who all fall in love with her. Yet notwithstanding that their amorousness provokes Lina to deliver the one really vigorous speech, Hypatia's complaint at an earlier stage remains applicable: 'How I envy the animals! They cant talk. . . . It never stops: talk, talk, talk, talk. . . .' It is she, however, who has the last word as the play ends. Her father having stammered out, 'Well, I suppose—er—I suppose theres nothing more to be said', Hypatia answers fervently, 'Thank goodness!' Nothing becomes *Misalliance* so well as the ending of it.

For a performance organized to help the fund for establishing a National Theatre in memory of Shakespeare (a project still unrealized forty years later) Shaw wrote *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. A sprightly piece which acts well and reads well, it can be enjoyed without staying to consider the author's claim that his sketch of Shakespeare has some resemblance to the original, and also without fretting over the point that appears to have disturbed the first audience—that Shaw's

imagined character impugns Shakespeare's^{use} originality. Whenever another character uses a striking phrase Shaw's Shakespeare notes it on his tablets for future use, acquiring in that way such 'jewels of unconsciously musical speech' as 'frailty, thy name is woman', 'you cannot feed capons so', 'all the perfumes of Arabia', among others. This is legitimate fun, and is so adroitly managed that it does not become a mechanical trick. There can be no doubt, however, that the central figure should properly be named Shaw-Shakespeare, for in constructing the character Shaw has clearly aimed at a back-projection of how he himself would have behaved in similar circumstances at the end of the sixteenth century. Among many good moments in this little play the most magnificent is when Mary Fitton, in jealous rage, rushing to part her lover and The Cloaked Lady, discovers too late the woman's identity. In abject terror she cries: 'Will: I am lost: I have struck the Queen.' With superb indignation he gives the majestic answer: 'Woman: you have struck WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.'

Though Shaw applied the word 'trivial' to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* it is a triviality of the best quality; humorous, witty, and entirely credible within its own fictional framework. Unlike that in *Misalliance*, which sags all the time, the dialogue here is swift and taut from the moment the curtain rises at midsummer night on the terrace of Whitehall Palace with the Beefeater challenging: 'Stand. Who goes there? Give the word.' and Shakespeare answering with bland yet audacious frankness: 'Marry! I cannot. I have clean forgotten it.'

Fanny's First Play, staged anonymously, ran for more than 620 performances, the longest run of any play by

Shaw. The 'secret' of the authorship could not be maintained, for in spite of some early guesses that Barrie had written it, there was obviously only one playwright whose work it could be. Since the first production it has been usual to perform the main three-act play without the Induction and Epilogue which frame it. Possibly the dialogue between the dramatic critics gathered for a private performance of Fanny's play, without knowing the author's name beforehand, has lost its point except for those who remember (or have searched out in contemporary newspapers) the bewildered comments of the critics on Shaw's early plays. Three of the critics in *Fanny's First Play* were identifiable by many in 1911: Gilbert Gunn as William Archer, Ibsen's translator and Shaw's benefactor in the 1880s and 1890s and his lifelong friend: Mr. Trotter as A. B. Walkley (of *The Times*); Mr. Vaughan as E. A. Baughan (of the *Daily News*). The fourth, Flawner Bannel, represents the type of young man who takes to dramatic criticism because he has 'a slight turn for writing' but no other qualification. Anyone who examines A. B. Walkley's published essays can discover points of resemblance between his style and that of Mr. Trotter, particularly in their deference to Aristotle ('the stagi-rite'), in their fondness for tag-ends of French (which Fanny imitates and exaggerates to provoke Trotter), and in their heavily playful man-of-the-world humour. Fanny quickly sees through his mask of sophistication and tells him, aptly, that he is 'a dear, good, well-meaning, delightful, witty, charming baby; but still just a wee lamb in a world of wolves'. Trotter's insistence that the kind of entertainments, conversations, discussions, dialogues, and exhibitions of character then coming into vogue on the stage must not in any circum-

stances be called plays, is an echo of what was for many years the stock comment on each new work by Shaw, 'Blah, blah, blah . . . but, *of course*, it isn't A PLAY.' If such points are kept in mind, the Induction and especially the Epilogue still provide a good deal of interest and amusement.

In the play proper, Family Life is in the dock. Bobby Gilbey having been brought up by his parents 'too strict', as his girl friend Darling Dora tells them, passes fourteen days in gaol after he and Dora have had a frolic with a policeman's helmet. Margaret Knox, whose parents are friends of the Gilbeys, finds herself in Holloway women's prison for being drunk and disorderly. Her adventure occurred in the company of a French marine officer she picked up at a Leicester Square music hall into which the lights and excitement drew her on Boat Race night after she had been to a Salvation Festival at the Albert Hall. The hymn-singing went to her head and, she tells her parents when she gets back after her fortnight in captivity, 'I felt it was ridiculous to go home in a bus after we had been singing so wonderfully about climbing up the golden stairs to heaven. I wanted more music—more happiness—more life.' Her description of her treatment by the police was undoubtedly derived by Shaw from the experiences of woman involved in the suffrage agitation at that time. Margaret points out that her puritanically religious mother had prayed that the Lord would enlighten her, and that now enlightenment had come its effect was vastly different from what Mrs. Knox had expected. It brought inward strength, instead of conventional happiness, and set her free from the narrowing and spiritually confining home life. In short, Margaret discovered—and in this the New Testament and Bernard Shaw agree—

that true religion means having life and having it more abundantly.

Fanny's First Play can be taken as a model demonstration of Shaw's power of putting new life into material so well-worn and familiar that it is stale and exhausted in other hands. Here is, in form, a domestic comedy, with added farcical paraphernalia in a butler who turns out to be a duke's brother and marries his employer's daughter; a bouncing cockney concertina-playing street girl given to changing hats with her temporary male companions; and a voluble Frenchman who uses his foot instead of his fist to punch a policeman on the ear. The Gilbeys and Mrs. Knox might be found in some old melodrama: Mr. and Mrs. Gilbey as the sorrowful parents of a boy who breaks their hearts by taking up with a 'fast' girl and landing in a prison cell; Mrs. Knox as a bitter religious fanatic whose dispirited daughter sinks into an early grave. Shaw, however, takes this group of dust covered lay-figures out of the old theatrical loft and breathes life into them, so that they become for us, if not in every case likeable, at least understandable human creatures. Two of them are lovable—Darling Dora, whose vitality and goodheartedness more than offset her exuberant vulgarity; and Mrs. Gilbey, a simple comforting maternal body whose innocent puzzlement while she tries to make sense of Dora's conversation and behaviour win the audience's purring affection.

Unlike most of the intelligentsia among whom he found his early following, Shaw did not despise the simple hearted or those whose utter guilelessness makes them seem poor in spirit. In *Androcles and the Lion* he takes a simple-hearted and poor-spirited little henpecked Greek tailor as a suitable pivot for a play dealing with

early Christianity, i.e. Christianity in the time of the Roman persecutions before it had become encrusted with the barnacles of dogma and theology and slimed with ecclesiological sophistication. It is entirely fitting—indeed, it is a stroke of dramatic inevitability—that, notwithstanding its preoccupation with the most serious of all subjects, this play in which the childlike Androcles is central should be conducted in the atmosphere of pantomime, the most childlike of all stage media. Not only has the lion to be, perforce, a pantomime lion—a skin with a man inside—but Megaera, Androcles' wife, is a pantomime wife; nay, more, she is *the* pantomime wife and Dan Leno could have played her. Androcles says the Christians are 'Just like us, dear' when she calls them 'the very lowest of the low', and Megaera responds, as any pantomime Dame would, 'Speak for yourself. Dont you dare to compare me to common people. My father owned his own public-house; and sorrowful was the day for me when you first came drinking in our bar.' Shaw does not in this way vulgarize the theme, he universalizes it; for if Dan Leno might have played Megaera, Charlie Chaplin might have played Androcles. And it is on the level of Chaplin and Dan Leno that all sorts and conditions meet in common sympathy and common understanding. Moreover, on that same level fundamental humour makes contact with fundamental pathos, fusing into a spiritually cleansing influence with something of the cathartic power which is widely supposed to operate through tragedy alone.

Megaera is at once the archetypal pantomime dame and the archetypal shrew who bullies when she can and weeps in self-pity when bullying needs reinforcement by spurious emotionalism. It is as impossible not to detest and despise her as a horrifyingly exact drawing from the

life as it is not to laugh at her as a grand revivification of a traditional stock figure of the stage.

Parts of *Androcles and the Lion* which had little or no current significance when it was written in 1912 are now appropriate to present-day themes. The Roman Captain's exhortations to Lavinia, the Christian maiden, need few verbal changes to bring them into line with the phraseology of mid-twentieth century propagandists: his 'every Christian who has perished in the arena has really committed suicide' is analogous to the later political lie, 'shot while attempting to escape'; his 'In throwing you to the lions [the Emperor] will be upholding the interests of religion. . . . If you were to throw him to the lions, that would no doubt be persecution' is pure totalitarian doctrine; and other of the Captain's warnings and blandishments might be rendered in terms of prohibitions to fraternize with the enemy or of invitations to collaborate.

The exceptional range of Shaw's instinctive understanding of deep-seated human motives, which the hoodwinked critics supposed were beyond his comprehension, is nowhere more illuminatingly shown than in Lavinia's reply to the Captain's suggestion that she could sacrifice to the Roman god without violating her principles, on the assumption that Jupiter and Zeus and the Christian God are one and the same deity variously named. During her lengthy answer Lavinia gets to the root of the matter and in a very few words exposes the eternal powerlessness of persecutors against the persecuted: '. . . Captain, if I took a pinch of incense in my hand and stretched it out over the altar fire, my hand would come back. My body would be true to my faith even if you could corrupt my mind. . . .' As Lavinia in her preceding speech had said that none but she her-

self could violate her soul, the implication is clear that her resolute body would be acting as the agent and instrument of the incorruptible spirit triumphing over mental corruption.

Shaw was subjected to more parrotwise repetition of unsound criticism than most authors. To the end of his life it was common practice to repeat what someone—possibly William Archer or, maybe, Robert Louis Stevenson—had suggested in the 1890s: namely that Shaw's characters were only mouthpieces or megaphones for the expression of his own opinions. Enough has already been said in the present book to establish that human characters expressing all manner of opinions abound in his plays. Among that company are Androcles and Megaera, each of them thoroughly human and neither a mouthpiece, for Androcles' timidity, as well as Megaera's self-pitying shrewishness, was foreign to Shaw's own nature. Where the denigrating critics might have made a case they missed their opportunity. It is a fact that among Shaw's characters there are, beside clearly individualized persons, a number of 'types' representing multifarious attitudes and points of view. In *Androcles and the Lion*, for example, all but Androcles are types: Lavinia, the faithful type; Ferrovius, the combative muscular-Christian type; Spintho, the hypocritical type. Most playwrights, the greatest among them, have used some, even if not many, type-characters. What is remarkable with Shaw in this connection is that most of his type-characters—usually standing for some idea, good or bad—are given such powerful inward motive force that they are less automata gramophoning than ideas talking and moving. And when these ideas, these types, are lent the bodies of stage players, their original non-humanness easily escapes

detection in the theatre, as it does with *Androcles and the Lion*, where the pantomime romp with the lion engages the delighted attention of any to whom the arguments for and against persecution may be no great matter.

Failure to find some saving feature even in a bad play by Shaw is a very rare experience. *Overruled*, however, provides that experience. This one-act piece was designed to show that polygamous inclination or extra-matrimonial attraction could be treated in the key of farcical comedy as well as in the key of tragedy (e.g. *Tristan and Isolde*) or philosophic comedy (*Don Juan and Zerlina*). But the cross-currents and cross-purposes of Mr. Lunn and Mrs. Juno and Mr. Juno and Mrs. Lunn are as deficient in interest as in true humour, for none of the quartette has wit or sense or feeling. *Overruled* is more ludicrous than comic.

From 1912 onward Shaw's plays were usually first produced abroad. Unfavourable notices by English critics after the first performances of earlier plays had created such prejudice among foreign managers that Shaw determined that Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Zurich, Boston, New York should be given opportunity for independent judgement by having the first sight of most of his later works. *Androcles and the Lion* was first performed in Berlin in 1912, the year before it appeared in London; and *Pygmalion* was done in Vienna in October 1913, preceding by six months its production at His Majesty's Theatre, London, on 11 April 1914, with Sir Herbert Tree as Henry Higgins the professor of phonetics and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Eliza Doolittle the flower girl.

Phonetics, in the general opinion, rivals political economy as 'the dismal science'. It was therefore Shaw's supreme feat to achieve his greatest popular success with a play having phonetics as its subject. No doubt because of the war, *Pygmalion*—with 118 performances—had a much shorter initial run than *Fanny's First Play*, but it has since been acted by repertory and amateur companies times without number and was made into an exceptionally popular and profitable film. Although this success was fully deserved on merit, the deletion of one word from the original text would most probably have meant that *Pygmalion* would never reach the multitude to whom its title did become a household word. It must remain one of the mysteries of the British mentality that when Eliza uses the word 'bloody' every audience screams (literally and hideously screams) with laughter. At early performances the unexpectedness in one of London's most respectable theatres of this word from the underworld of language, and its incongruity at that moment in the play, explained the mighty gasp of surprise and the following laughter; but though the scene in which the word is spoken has become almost universally familiar, audiences noticeably fill their lungs and stiffen their sinews moments ahead and the screams of laughter come as an automatic reaction as mechanical as (and far more certain than) the delivery of a ticket when a coin is dropped into a ticket machine. The mystery is deeper now that people pay eagerly to hear a word that has passed into hourly and meaningless currency among all classes. And there is irony in the accident that a play written to promote the cause of good and well-spoken language should have its popularity rooted in a cautionary example of bad language.

Shaw was one of the finest speakers of his time, and his interest in phonetics as a key to good speech and ease in writing extended over many years. Speech was hardly less than a branch of music to him. Choosing his own words as much with his ear as with his mind, he became one of the foremost masters of English prose style, and as a playwright he wrote dialogue which comes trippingly from the players' tongues. Good speech, however, depends upon pronunciation and enunciation as well as upon the quality of the words spoken, and Shaw advocated a forty-two letter phonetic alphabet in which every letter should represent one and only one sound. Spelling would thus be made an exact notation for speech and (in theory at least) children could be taught to avoid the horrors of sound uttered by Eliza Doolittle and multitudes of her kind. Speech, Shaw believed, was the great barrier between social classes, and Higgins's experiment with Eliza was intended to support the proposition that the individual difference between a flower-girl and a duchess is no greater than the difference between the sounds they make when talking. The intermediate stage in Eliza's progress gives rise to the admirable third act of *Pygmalion*, which shows her in command of 'pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone', which she can only use, however, either with the slow deliberation of an automaton, or with ease in her own ungrammatical and impolite vocabulary. The one style is represented by Eliza's answer to Mrs. Higgins's 'Will it rain, do you think?': 'The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.'—spoken slowly as separate words coming from the instructed memory

but not from the mind. The other style produces, in the same precise manner and tone, Eliza's spontaneous recollections of incidents from her own past experience. She speaks of a diphtheria-stricken aunt: '. . . Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat til she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.'

In spite of hints and warnings from his mother and his friend Colonel Pickering, Higgins concentrates upon Eliza as a speech phenomenon and neglects Eliza the woman. Having achieved his phonetic triumph, he has nothing better to suggest than that this speaker of perfect English should return to flower-selling, in a shop instead of in the streets. But he finds to his astonishment and annoyance that he had made a human being with a soul and a heart, not simply a beautiful statue capable of exquisite speech. Once again a Pygmalion has created his Galatea. For a while, in Act IV, Eliza becomes a potentially tragic figure. Higgins says to Pickering in her hearing, 'Thank God it's over!' and later, replying to Eliza's protest, 'Well, dont y o u thank God it's all over? Now you are free and can do what you like.' She answers: 'What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? Whats to become of me? . . . I wish youd left me where you found me.' Eliza's cry is more poignant than she knew, for it has been echoed by many who have been educated out of their class only to be set adrift. Higgins's plea that he did what he did because it was his job is the only possible answer to the cry; it is the plea of historical necessity: 'Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble. . . .'

If Higgins faced up to the historical imperative, Shaw did not face up to the dramatic imperative in *Pygmalion*. Had the play been allowed to take what, in terms of drama, is its predestined course, Liza would have married Higgins—for better, for worse. It would have made trouble—but ‘making life means making trouble. . . .’ The issue is left in the air when the curtain falls, but a long postscript to the printed text informs the reader by a meandering rigmarole that Eliza married the young man to whom she spoke the startling word in Act II, and that they at length made good in a flower and vegetable shop subsidized by Colonel Pickering. Shaw’s anti-romanticism here carried him into a maze of improbability, whereas the conventional ‘romantic’ solution would have conformed aptly to probability and, also, would have satisfied the imponderable demands of poetic justice.

Upon the incidental merits of *Pygmalion* there is little need to dwell. The opening scene, on the portico of St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, on a wet summer night, is a thrilling piece of stagecraft. It is no cliché to call it thrilling, for it provided a genuine theatrical thrill when the curtain rose on the first production, with rain pouring down in the semi-darkness and voices coming from the pillared spaces. Eliza’s indignant yowlings and muttered complaints project her unreformed character firmly to the audience, while her magnificent departure in the taxi closes the scene on an effervescent burst of hilarity.

Higgins’s utter devotion to phonetics, his apparent boorishness, and his disregard of social observances were drawn from Henry Sweet the eminent Oxford phonetician, though Higgins is enlarged in the play to the stature of a genuine creation. Eliza’s tribute to Colonel

Pickering is also a tribute to Shaw's success in bringing a gentleman to life on the stage, for she says that self-respect began in her when she found that Pickering treated her as a lady from the first: 'I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower-girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.' Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, belongs to the genus that Shaw created as far back as the early 1890s with Lickcheese in *Widowers' Houses*. Doolittle, a more unblushing rascal than Lickcheese, delights to proclaim himself one of the undeserving poor, and when an unexpected legacy from America hoists him into prosperity he bemoans his subjection to respectability and middle-class morality. Doolittle and those of his breed in other Shaw plays are scarcely drawn from 'the life'; yet they live as true-born offspring of an exuberant and puckish imagination.

Chapter Nine

HEARTBREAK HOUSE TO BACK TO METHUSELAH: 1913-1920

Heartbreak House (1913-19); *Great Catherine* (1913); *Playlets of the War* (O'Flaherty, V.C., 1915; *The Inca of Perusalem*, 1916; *Augustus Does His Bit*, 1916; *Annajanska, The Bolshevik Princess*, 1917); *Back to Methuselah* (*In the Beginning*; *The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas*; *The Thing Happens*; *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*; *As Far As Thought Can Reach*) (1918-20)

BEFORE Shaw's next play was finished, the Great War (as the First World War was called until a greater, i.e. a bigger, war came to dwarf it) engulfed much of Europe and parts of the world beyond. *Heartbreak House* did not reach the stage until 1920 in New York and 1921 in London. Though its reception was scarcely enthusiastic, it impressed some as the most important of Shaw's plays, and that assessment of its worth became more general as years passed. There is, however, no touchstone to settle beyond question which is his best play. In differing respects, superiority could be claimed for *Man and Superman*, for *Heartbreak House*, for *Saint Joan*. It is enough to say that *Heartbreak House* has its own excellences: the variety and flesh-and-blood solidity of its characters; the prophetic nature of its theme; the soundness of its moral values; the disturbingly impressive visionary faculty of the central figure, Cap-

tain Shotover; the buoyant amplitude of its humour, which yet consorts well with the high seriousness and warp-and-woof common sense of the play. Its indeterminate ending is the only major weakness, unless the inappositeness of the sub-title is to be regarded as indicating that Shaw failed to achieve his intention. When he described *Heartbreak House* as 'a Fantasia in the Russian manner on English themes', he had the Tchekov manner in mind and particularly the manner of *The Cherry Orchard*. But Tchekov's was an elusive, almost bodiless manner, in which living creatures become so drenched in the spirit of place that they appear to merge with the atmosphere, until time and place and personality unify and 'a common greyness silvers everything'. Not until the last act has *Heartbreak House* any resemblance to Tchekov, and then the resemblance is only slight and remote. That act has the dreamlike quality of a still summer night when the human spirit is languid and voices are muted, rather than Tchekov's bitter-sweet melancholy of dissolution. Shaw's mind was too robust and thrusting to fit the Tchekov manner; while English acting is for the most part so matter-of-fact that the last act of *Heartbreak House* is usually played in the wrong key.

If *Heartbreak House* is not in every respect a great play, it has at least brought to the stage, in Captain Shotover, one of the great characters in English drama. His eccentricity, so cunningly devised by the author that it appears in grain with the old man's nature, gives Shotover the quality of strangeness needed to raise him to more than ordinary stature and to turn his superficially crazy sayings into the oracular deliverances of a prophet—a prophet, moreover, who is as capable of sardonic wit as of candid wisdom. Shotover is a comic

character of the first order as well as a visionary; and, also, he has moments when his words are deeply moving, as when he says to Ellie Dunn: 'I am too weary to resist, or too weak. I am in my second childhood. I do not see you as you really are. I can't remember what I really am. I feel nothing but the accursed happiness I have dreaded all my life long: the happiness that comes as life goes, the happiness of yielding and dreaming instead of resisting and doing, the sweetness of the fruit that is going rotten.'

Yet it is from the old sea-captain that the inhabitants of Heartbreak House—which Shaw says in his Preface to the play 'is cultured, leisured Europe before the war' that began in 1914—hear the grave warning which was shown by the subsequent course of history to be desperately needed and desperately urgent. The Captain (in Act III) answers Mazzini Dunn's complacent reference to an over-ruling Providence by saying 'Every drunken skipper trusts to Providence. But one of the ways of Providence with drunken skippers is to run them on the rocks.' A few minutes later Hector Hushabye (the surname will be significant to those who recall the nursery rhyme)—Hector Hushabye asks: 'And what of this ship we are all in? This soul's prison we call England?' . . . 'The captain is in his bunk, drinking bottled ditch-water', the old man declares, 'and the crew is gambling in the forecastle. She will strike and sink and split. Do you think the laws of God will be suspended in favour of England because you were born in it?' When Hector inquires what he is to do about it, the Captain answers, 'Learn your business as an Englishman.' . . . 'And what may my business as an Englishman be, pray?' . . . 'Navigation. Learn it and live; or leave it and be damned.'

Next to the charge that his characters are mere puppets, the critics' most frequent stock complaint against Shaw in his lifetime was that he diagnosed the world's ills (this, said the critics, is mere destructive criticism) but offered no remedy (and this, they said, showed that he had nothing constructive to suggest). But is it merely destructive to point out, when no one else appears to bother much about it, that the captain of the ship is endangering the vessel? And is it not constructive to say plainly that the ship can be saved if it is put into the control of a captain who has learned navigation? Dropping metaphor, is it merely destructive to urge that before politicians set up as statesmen they should learn the business of statecraft—i.e. the skilled management of human beings and their institutions? Is it not valuably constructive to enable a multitude of readers and theatregoers to make rational deductions from presented evidence? If it be answered that the world appears to be in a worse state now than before Shaw began to write and that his work was therefore valueless, the same might be said of the founder of Christianity. The words of a prophet do not fructify in a few decades. And only those who have recourse to black pessimism—which is simply another name for moral and spiritual indolence—take the view that the world is worsening. The newspaper press has fostered the deplorable dogma that *Evil is news; Good is not news*. The few parents who ill-use their children get into the papers; the many whose children have reason to call them blessed are no concern of the journalists. It was because of his awareness that the world-picture is thus distorted that Shaw retained to the end his belief in ultimate goodness, despite the drunken skippers and their dangerous antics. The ship was in peril and warn-

ing needed, but the ship was not yet wrecked and must somehow be saved. The first of Captain Shotover's last three speeches is: 'The judgement has come. Courage will not save you; but it will show that your souls are still alive'; and his final words: 'Turn in, all hands. The ship is safe.' Shaw's deepest conviction could not be more concisely summed up than in the nine words 'your souls are still alive . . . the ship is safe'.

Heartbreak House, however, like Shaw's work as a whole, offers no encouragement to lazy optimism. Though the ship may in the end be saved from disaster, it is nevertheless an untidy ship with a muddled crew, and as such it wrings from Captain Shotover many biting comments. The play begins with Ellie Dunn's arrival as a visitor invited by her friend Hesione Hushabye, but the house is apparently deserted and she is left to wait and doze alone before the housekeeper, Nurse Guinness, comes in. Shaw was particularly happy with his stage portraits of domestic servants, and Guinness (who, later, by a too-neat coincidence turns out to be the wife of the burglar who breaks in in the second act) is one of his happiest minor creations.

The friendship of the girl Ellie and the woman Hesione has a depth of feeling which brings emotion as well as humour into the discovery that the handsome romancer with whom Ellie has fallen in love is Hesione's husband, Hector Hushabye, hitherto known to Ellie as Marcus Darnley. Hector's duplicity shocks Ellie into cynicism, but experience has schooled Hesione into a balanced view of Hector's character. When Ellie asks her how she can love a liar, Hesione answers: 'I dont know. But you can, fortunately. Otherwise there wouldnt be much love in the world. . . . People dont have their virtues and vices in sets: they have them anyhow: all

mixed.' Hesione is the stable element in this unsettled household, though in her second-act quarrel with Ellie the placid manner is temporarily shattered as she says to the girl, 'I warn you that when I am neither coaxing and kissing nor laughing, I am just wondering how much longer I can stand living in this cruel, damnable world.'

The crucial question is whether young Ellie shall marry elderly Boss Mangan, the crude financier whom she believes to be her father's benefactor, though Mangan has in fact ruined Mazzini Dunn before employing him as a manager. Mazzini, who refers to himself as 'a consecrated soldier of freedom', acknowledges in the exquisitely managed scene with Hesione in Act II that he is in practical matters a footling person, able to start businesses but not to run them at a profit, because he cannot care for money enough to put dividends before the quality of goods and the welfare of employers. He does not see Mangan with Hesione's eyes as a repulsive creature, but as a capable organizer who rescues and protects the Mazzini Dunns from bankruptcy; and consequently he is not shocked by the prospect of a marriage between Ellie and Mangan.

The best of many fine passages in *Heartbreak House* is that in which Captain Shotover puts to Ellie the moral case against her becoming Mangan's wife, when she asks his advice and acknowledges that she wants nothing of Mangan but money. Shotover impresses upon her that her soul is more important than money, but she attempts to justify her mercenary intention by declaring that a soul is a very expensive thing to keep: 'It eats music and pictures and books and mountains and lakes and beautiful things to wear and nice people to be with. In this country you cant have them without money: that is why our souls are so horribly starved.' There is

no sounder or more uplifting wisdom anywhere in Shaw's works than in Shotover's speeches in this scene. The climax of his protest to Ellie is only one of numerous memorable passages here and elsewhere in *Heartbreak House*: 'I see you, the younger generation, turning from their romance and sentiment and snobbery to money and comfort and hard common sense. I was ten times happier on the bridge in the typhoon, or frozen into Arctic ice for months in darkness, than you or they have ever been. You are looking for a rich husband. At your age I looked for hardship, danger, horror, and death, that I might feel the life in me more intensely. I did not let the fear of death govern my life; and my reward was, I had my life. You are going to let the fear of poverty govern your life, and your reward will be that you will eat, but you will not live.'

The wisdom and fervour of the old navigator inevitably lose their true dramatic point if they are isolated from the play as a whole. *Heartbreak House* is a complex establishment; its inhabitants are not separable units but interdependent parts of a multiple organism. If Shotover is the soul of the house, Hesione is its practical manager without whom the soul would go adrift in the void. Hector the handsome liar is the decorative accessory—Art, perhaps, or Imagination—without which the Captain's philosophy and Hesione's domestic skill would make but a drab contribution to the household. Lady Utterword (the Captain's second daughter, Ariadne) and Randall Utterword her brother-in-law, are other decorative accessories—social pretension and frivolity. She holds that 'There are only two classes in good society in England: the equestrian classes and the neurotic classes. It isn't mere convention: everybody can see that the people who hunt are the right people and the

people who dont are the wrong ones.' Lady Utterword, however, is far from being as big a fool as she sounds. Ellie is modern Youth, disillusioned and cynical, serious and honest—callow in her seriousness and crude in her honesty, pitiable in her disillusionment and absurd in her cynicism—yet with the fledgling innocence and grace of all unsmirched young things. Mazzini is the feckless humanitarian goodwill and vague intellectualism which can invent and originate but cannot cope with material affairs. Mangan has the brainless passion for money and power which qualifies him to use the Mazzinis as his tools and get the world's work done: a parasite that arouses its host to activity even while it sucks his blood.

It is important, however, to avoid confusion of thought about Shaw's plays and the persons in them. When considered *as plays*, apart from their significance as philosophical or political or social documents—and more and more as time passes they will be valued as plays—it is not what the characters symbolize or typify that matters most, but what they are in themselves as men and women. Any manipulator of a mental magic lantern can project a symbol or a type on to a screen or on to a page in a book; but only through a genuine creative act can symbols and types be brought to life as three-dimensional creatures upon a stage. It is not what a character *means* that is of first importance but what the character *is*. If the character stands on its feet, breathes and moves and thinks and feels, laughs and weeps, loves and hates and sins and does good; if, in short, it behaves as men and women *do* behave in common experience, and inspires in us the attractions and repulsions—in whatever heightened or refined degree—that men and women do inspire, the character may then, but not until

then, go on to 'stand for', or typify or symbolize any virtue or vice or theory or ideal the author chooses. The golden rule for a playwright is *First catch your character*. The playwright *manqué* who grabs his idea and supposes that all the rest is either child's play or an enforced concession to dunderheads which he need only botch up is a familiar figure in the twentieth century. He has often learned, so he fancies, from Bernard Shaw; but he has learned only what he has himself misconceived. *Heartbreak House* is a great play because the house is occupied by people, people about whom we are compelled to care whatever they do or say, think or believe. About doings and sayings, thoughts and beliefs, we care incomparably less, or care not at all, if they reach us as abstractions or are mouthed by puppets. With acknowledgements to whoever said *America is People*, it can be claimed that *Heartbreak House is people*; that its people convey needed warnings and permanent wisdom is incidental, though of high importance. And because we ourselves live in the house, it is as real to us as it is to Ellie, 'this silly house, this strangely happy house, this agonizing house, this house without foundations. I shall call it Heartbreak House'.

No important new play by Bernard Shaw was performed between 1914 and 1921 in England (1913 and 1920 abroad), but several minor pieces were written and acted for particular purposes. In 1913, the one-act play in four scenes *Great Catherine* was brought into existence, Shaw says, to give Gertrude Kingston the opportunity to play a queen. This short work must be regarded almost exclusively as an opportunity for acting of the physical kind, for nothing of importance is said. Catherine the Great of Russia (the Empress Catherine II)

is seen first in bed and later in full imperial regalia. Edstaston, a young English captain with a romantic admiration for her arrives at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to seek an audience of the Empress. He carries a letter from the British Ambassador and is ostensibly to give Catherine news of the rebellion in America (the year is 1776). Edstaston is conducted to the apartment of Prince Patiomkin, Catherine's gigantic, hideous, ruffianly, and roaring counsellor, who in drunken sport lugs the Englishman in his arms to the Empress's *petit lever* in her bedchamber and dumps him on the foot of the bed. Catherine's amorous interest is aroused by Edstaston, and when he leaves the palace without obeying a summons to visit her again, she has him kidnapped. Having been trussed and brought back, he is left, still bound, on the floor of an antechamber to the state ballroom, where Catherine torments him by tickling him in the ribs with her toe. The English girl to whom Edstaston is engaged finds him in this predicament and, after a jealous outburst, rescues him from the Empress's clutches. *Great Catherine* could pass for a parody of Shaw by Noel Coward and, as of several of Coward's own plays, it can be said of this that 'it plays better than it reads'.

In a prefatory note to *O'Flaherty, V.C.* (the first of his *Playlets of the War*) Shaw wrote: 'It may surprise some people to learn that in 1915 this little play was a recruiting poster in disguise.' It cannot surprise anyone who reads or hears it to learn that the English authorities did not share the author's opinion that it would stimulate recruiting in Ireland for the British forces, and that it was not then performed. Denis O'Flaherty, brought back from the battlefield to address recruiting meetings

in his own country, finds this more exhausting than life in the trenches. In his speeches at meetings he boasts on a Falstaffian scale, claiming to have fought the Kaiser and twelve Prussian guards single-handed. When the local priest invites O'Flaherty to pay for masses for the souls of the Germans he has killed, his answer is 'Let the King of England pay for them . . . for it was his quarrel and not mine.' To his implacable anti-English old mother he has pretended that he was going to fight for the Germans; and when General Madigan, on whose estate O'Flaherty was born, asks him why he can't explain to her what the war is about, he replies 'Arra, sir, how the divil do I know what the war is about?' The young man goes on to talk a lot of good sense: of the ignorance bred among the Irish by having their minds filled with corrosive hatred of the English; of the wrongness of all war; of how the English never thought of being patriotic until the war broke out; and he tells the General 'Youll never have a quiet world til you knock the patriotism out of the human race.' Mrs. O'Flaherty may have been cast as a mere two-dimensional figure for a recruiting poster, but she refuses to stay flat on the paper. She holds that all the great English generals and great English poets were Irish and that Shakespeare was born in Cork; but her political and cultural animosities are not accompanied by animus against England as a provider: '. . . please God the war will last a long time yet, and may be I'll die before its over and the separation allowance stops'. Shaw himself described Mrs. O'Flaherty as 'a Volumnia of the potato patch', but in the considered opinion, emphatically expressed, of Denis's young woman, Teresa Driscoll, she is 'a foul mouthed, dirty minded, lying, sloothering old sow'. There is no need to arbitrate between Shaw

and Teresa in order to establish that the old lady has blood in her veins and an inventive tongue.

The arduous of recruiting and the turmoil of domestic relationships lead O'Flaherty to say at the end: 'Some likes war's alarums; and some likes home life. I've tried both, sir; and I'm all for war's alarums now. I always was a quiet lad by natural disposition.' Shaw's view in the prefatory note was that 'No one will ever know how many men joined the army in 1914 and 1915 to escape from tyrants and taskmasters, termagants and shrews, none of whom are any the less irksome when they happen by ill-luck to be also our fathers, our mothers, our wives and our children.'

One of the curiosities and also one of the charms and compensations of existence is that every virtue can be pursued to the point at which it becomes in human eyes an anti-virtue. The completely rational man is a virtuous man, since vice is always irrational; yet the completely rational man is an incomplete man, inasmuch as he denies himself to the deeper experiences which, though irrational, are imperative to a full life. Therefore the virtue of rationality is at the same time the anti-virtue of incompleteness, for incompleteness is imperfection and imperfection posits some element of non-virtue. As a rational creature Shaw withheld himself, after certain early experimental forays, from the experience of ecstasy which love in the full sense requires and which necessitates abandonment of rational control. Though characters in Shaw's plays do fall in love from time to time—for example, Hesione in *Heartbreak House* fell in love with Hector and as his wife remained in love with him—the representation of them in that state is an act of Shaw's intellectual imagination, not an emotional

projection such as the representation of the love-state almost universally is in works of art by other hands. Shaw's negation of ecstasy, however, produced a deficiency at both ends of the emotional scale, for as he withheld himself from the ecstasy of love so also he was withheld from the ecstasy of hate.

The incapacity for hate was not only a moral and spiritual virtue in Shaw, it was also the source of that remarkable power of dramatic detachment which allowed him to give the devil his due, but not more than his due, in all the plays: it enabled him, that is, to deal as fairly with sinners as with saints, with fools as with the wise, with average people as with exceptional people. Moreover, this same incapacity for hate bred in him the utter scrupulousness which appears in the foreword to *The Inca of Perusalem*. But for its facetious punning title, this 'almost historical comedietta' might have received more attention, if only as an actable and amusing stage trifle.

The Inca stood for Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, the non-German world's current bogymen from 1914 to 1918. A great advantage of the rational mind is that it offers no lodgement to bogymen. Nothing is more infuriating to the multitude, however, than that anyone should see its bogymen as just a human creature who is being an intolerable nuisance or is set up as a figure-head by trouble-makers behind him. Throughout recorded history factions and communities have had their bogymen—terrifying to-day, figures of fun to-morrow, and, maybe, heroes and sages in the judgement of historians. Of Wilhelm II Shaw wrote at the end of the war: 'Many were so horribly afraid of him that they could not forgive me for not being afraid of him: I seemed to be trifling heartlessly with a deadly peril. I knew better; and I have represented Caesar [i.e. the

Kaiser=the Inca] as knowing better himself. . . . Now that this is all over, and the upshot of the fighting has shown that we could quite well have afforded to laugh at the doomed Inca, I am in another difficulty. I may be supposed to be hitting Caesar when he is down.' Shaw goes on to record that *The Inca of Perusalem* was written while the Germans were still on top, but that before publishing the play he deleted 'everything that could possibly be mistaken for a foul blow. . . . But I should certainly put the play in the fire instead of publishing it if it contained a word against our defeated enemy that I would not have written in 1913.' This scrupulous chivalry to an ex-bogyman was not a provocative piece of anti-British tenderness towards the enemy, but the natural outcome of Shaw's incapacity for hate. In saying that we could have afforded to laugh at the Inca while the war was on, he was pointing perhaps unconsciously to the way of salvation for mankind. A comic genius is needed to show war and warmongers in their true ridiculousness, to the end that peace shall return on worldwide gales of laughter. The material is ready at hand for the one who can use it.

In *The Inca of Perusalem* Ermyntrude, the hard-up widowed daughter of an English archdeacon, attaches herself as personal maid to a timid foreign princess who awaits the Inca in a hotel sitting-room where she is to be considered as a possible wife for one of his sons. Ermyntrude impersonates the princess, and since she is a forthright young woman the Inca is compelled to treat her as an equal. Confiding in her, he claims that 'beneath the trappings of Imperial Majesty there is a Man: simple, frank, modest, unaffected, colloquial: a sincere friend, a natural human being, a genial comrade, one eminently calculated to make a woman happy'.

He offers to become a Mahometan so that he can himself marry Ermyntrude as an additional wife, but it comes to nothing more in the end than a carriage drive and a visit to the Zoo. But before the curtain falls he has told her that his hope is to be sent to St. Helena so that he may outdo Napoleon by turning the island into a new Athens architecturally, a new Madrid pictorially, and a new Bayreuth musically. Then when every civilized country from the Carpathians to the Rocky Mountains has adopted republicanism, he will be unanimously invited to return from exile as 'Super-president of all the republics'. There is a momentary foreshadowing of King Magnus in *The Apple Cart* when the Inca says: 'An Inca can do nothing. He is tied hand and foot. A constitutional monarch is openly called an india-rubber stamp. An emperor is a puppet. The Inca is not allowed to make a speech: he is compelled to take up a screed of flatulent twaddle written by some noodle of a minister and read it aloud. . . .' And one theme of *Heartbreak House* is touched upon in the last of his longer speeches: that nations were more in love with death than with life, for they would not spend on beauty and health, on honor and comfort, a tithe of what they spent on war. 'They grudged a few hundreds a year for their salvation: they now pay millions a day for their own destruction and damnation.'

Of *Augustus Does His Bit: A True-to-Life Farce* there is no more to say than that it is easy fun just because it is in essence so true to experience—even truer now than in the less chronically bureaucratic 1917. It has dated in one respect, however, for 'Lord Augustus Highlands, a distinguished member of the governing classes'

is no longer in sole possession of the bureaucratic roost.

Written as a variety-theatre piece and performed at the London Coliseum in January 1918, *Annajanska, The Bolshevik Princess* must have been one of the very earliest dramatic offshoots of the Russian revolution. The Grand Duchess Annajanska, daughter of the ruling hereditary Panjandrum of Beotia, joins the revolutionaries in order to escape from the boring 'little patch of court splendor' in which she felt like a wax doll or a golden calf. As a child she had run away from the royal home and joined a circus because 'I wanted to get rid of my swaddling clothes and turn head over heels.' Now in the confused early days of tumult she has taken to the uniform of the Panderobajensky Hussars in order to lead the army and save the revolution. General Stammfest, who had been made reluctant Commander-in-Chief of the revolutionary army, belongs to a family that has served the Panjandrums for seven hundred years, and he has no illusions about his new masters. He complains to the Grand Duchess that he has been commanded by one of six rival dictators to go to 'a damned Socialist Conference and explain that Beotia will allow no annexations and no indemnities, and merely wishes to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth throughout the universe.' By no fault of Shaw this irony of 1918 has been brought down by events to the level of sarcasm: but those same events have given Stammfest a claim to be upgraded from the rank of malcontent to that of prophet: '. . . Do not be deceived by the fine speeches of the revolutionary leaders and the pamphlets of the revolutionary writers. How much liberty is there where t h e y have gained the upper hand? Are they not

hanging, shooting, imprisoning as much as ever we did? Do they ever tell the people the truth? No: if the truth does not suit them they spread lies instead, and make it a crime to tell the truth.'

Towards the end of his life Shaw habitually referred to his plays as 'pot-boilers', excepting only *Back to Methuselah* which he insistently set apart as his world masterpiece. The ways of posterity are strange, but they will prove to be stranger than usual if posterity should ever come to agree with Shaw's estimate of the comparative merit of *Back to Methuselah* and his other plays. If the favourite work embodied Shaw's gospel of Creative Evolution effectively, first place among his writings should be conceded to it on pious grounds; though if judged by dramatic and literary standards *Back to Methuselah* could not honestly be included among the best twelve of Shaw's plays. It is a sprawling monster of uncoordinated parts; few of the characters impress themselves upon the memory by genuine dramatic force or individual interest; while there is less humour, less wit, and less wisdom than in most of the other plays taken separately.

Back to Methuselah holds one melancholy interest, in seeming to prefigure the way of Shaw's own death, which followed upon an accidental fall in his garden. The first act of Part I (*In the Beginning*) is set in the Garden of Eden, where Adam calls Eve to look at a fawn that is dead, though they do not yet know the word 'dead' or the phenomenon which is death. Adam tells Eve that the fawn, while playing about, suddenly tripped and fell and never moved again. Eve wonders if that might happen one day to Adam also, and he replies: 'Sooner or later I shall trip and fall. It may be

tomorrow; it may be after as many days as there are leaves in the garden and grains of sand by the river. No matter: some day I shall forget and stumble.' In Part V (*As Far As Thought Can Reach*) in a sunlit glade on a summer afternoon of the year 31,920 A.D. The She-Ancient tells The Newly Born, '. . . you need not die until your accident comes. . . . Sooner or later you will fall . . . Something or other must make an end of you someday.'

The most impressive dialogue section of *Back to Methuselah* is the Garden of Eden scene, where the Serpent teaches Eve new words—dead, death, die; birth, born, life; miracles; desire, imagine, will, create. These last four are the seminal words of Shaw's Creative Evolution, for he believed that living creatures develop by desiring, by proceeding to imagine what they desire, thence to willing what they imagine, and also to creating what they have willed. But this hardly stands out as the central idea except to those who have already been apprised of its importance by the Preface. A jungle of other ideas is thrown up in speeches which have their own interest one by one, but do not always cohere.

The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas (Part II; 1920 A.D.) is ruined by the trivial caricatures of Lloyd George (Joyce Burge) and Asquith (Lubin) to whom the Barnabas brothers vainly endeavour to commend, as practical politics, their doctrine that the term of human life can be extended to three hundred years if the idea can be got 'into men's heads that there is nothing to prevent its happening but their own will to die before their work is done, and their own ignorance of the splendid work there is for them to do'. They specify three hundred years on the principle that a longer span

would be more than they dare face as yet, and that no shorter time is enough for human beings to master any worth-while vocation or to form a genuine conscience.

By 2170 A.D. (Part III) *The Thing Happens*, the Conrads' son-in-law (now the Archbishop of York) and also their parlourmaid (now the Domestic Minister) have survived the intervening 250 years, though involuntarily it seems, not by any act of will.

Part IV, *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, takes place in 3000 A.D. and is notable for what must be among the longest speeches in all drama, one by the Elderly Gentleman filling two and a half pages, another more than a page, and others many lines. The flippancy which is intermittent in Shaw's plays is present in an aggravated degree at several places in *Back to Methuselah*. The Elderly Gentleman is Shaw's stock convention-ridden Englishman grown senile. The name given to him, Joseph Popham Bolge Bluebin Barlow, O.M., is embarrassingly unfunny and Shaw's endeavours in the earlier part of the scene to fit the character to the name result only in making him unbelievable throughout. When, later, he talks sense we are unable to accept the sense and hear only the voice of Shaw from behind the mask of a zany. The second and third acts of Part IV introduce several new characters, including Napoleon and The Oracle, as well as more sense and nonsense. The British Envoy comes to ask The Oracle whether the government should dissolve parliament at once or defer the general election to the following spring. He requests the same answer as was given eighteen years before to his predecessor, who, on his return, had delivered in impressively oracular mumbo-jumbo a message encouraging to his own political party. The Oracle does give him the same answer as she gave before. It is:

'Go home, poor fool.' When the others have left and The Elderly Gentleman understands that The Envoy is going back to lie just as his predecessor lied, he asks The Oracle to allow him to stay in the country of the long-lived. But when he grasps her hands and she looks steadily into his face, he is convulsed and dies.

The aspiration of the Ancients in Part V (both the He-Ancient and the She-Ancient are apparently in the prime of life, but entirely hairless and 'without sexual charm') is to be freed from the encumbrance of the physical body. She says: 'The day will come when there will be no people, only thought.' He responds: 'And that will be life eternal.' In this part there is much discussion of art, love, beauty, and other matters; over the five parts the whole contents of the Shavian cornucopia are spilled, and this undisciplined prodigality defeats the audience and also the author's intentions. Yet from *Back to Methuselah* it would be easy to cull an anthology of splendid rhetoric, in which the most splendid and moving and inspiring passage would be the final speech, delivered by Lilith and closing with the famous lines: 'Of Life only is there no end; and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to its uttermost confines. And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond.'

Chapter Ten

SAINT JOAN TO THE APPLE CART: 1923-1929

Saint Joan (1923); *Translations and Tomfooleries* (*Jitta's Atonement*, 1922; *The Admirable Bashville*, 1901; *Press Cuttings*, 1909; *The Glimpse of Reality*, 1909; *Passion, Poison, and Petrification, or, The Fatal Gazogene*, 1905; *The Fascinating Foundling*, 1909; *The Music-Cure*, 1913); *The Apple Cart* (1929)

OTHERS were so far from accepting the author's view that *Back to Methuselah* was his paramount masterpiece, that at the time of its first performance in 1922/3 there was a good deal of murmuring that Bernard Shaw was 'finished', and some journalist-critics had already taken pen in hand to report his burial as a playwright. Less than two years later, however, *Saint Joan* appeared, stamped with all the insignia of a work of dramatic and literary art which must straightway be taken into the classic repertory of the English theatre.

Yet, fine though it is, *Saint Joan* has neither the originality and intellectual magnitude of *Man and Superman*, nor the fervour and broad humanity of *Heartbreak House*. But as a 'stage play' in the usual sense of the term—i.e. a play with strong dramatic situations, good acting parts, 'well dressed' in costume and scenery, with a highly efficient and practised dramatic craftsman's sense of shape, and a literary artist's sense of style—in

that limited sense *Saint Joan* is unsurpassed among Shaw's works and has few equals elsewhere in English drama. To apply the word 'limited' to the merits of *Saint Joan* may appear pernicketty and grudging, yet of all Shaw's plays it is the only one that, even in outline, a disciple could hope to imitate; the only one that suggests a latent ability in Shaw to turn out conventional well-made popular stage plays if he had not held the conviction that there was something more important for him to do.

Saint Joan is, in germ, a Romantic Drama about a young girl of lowly origin inspiring her elders and social betters; leading them triumphantly against her country's enemies; finding herself betrayed into hostile hands; braving her accusers and judges when brought to trial; and, at the last, enduring martyrdom. How easily *Saint Joan* could have been moulded into a rival of that pseudo-religious Roman-persecution melodrama, that (in the more expressive American idiom) saccharine tear jerker, *The Sign of the Cross* which Wilson Barrett toured throughout the world from 1896 until he died in 1904. There were, indeed, some who complained of just those things in *Saint Joan* which prevented its becoming another member of *The Sign of the Cross* family. 'They point out', says the author's Preface, 'that by the excision of the epilogue and all the references to such undramatic and tedious matters as the Church, the feudal system, the Inquisition, the theory of heresy and so forth, . . . the play could be considerably shortened.' What the critics were saying was, in effect, that if the brains were removed from *Saint Joan* there would remain a 'well-made' stage play conspicuously endowed with the limited merits of that kind of entertainment. What is so irritating to that class of critics

of Shaw's plays is that brains as well as cheerfulness will keep breaking in. It cannot be denied that brains are as big a nuisance on the stage as they are in the human head. The wretched things are not content to amble in blinkers along an old familiar rut; they *will* digress and speculate and explore and, as often as not, suggest that the old familiar conventional maps of belief and conduct need revision.

The familiar conventional view of Joan of Arc pictures her as a romantic heroic soldier-saint done to death by cruelly unjust religious fanatics. So far as it goes there is nothing much to be said against that view. To dismiss it out of hand merely because it is the emotional view would be absurd, for emotions have their rights no less than brains; there is emotional wisdom as well as cerebral wisdom. The fact that Shaw was more apt by temperament to listen to the brain than to the heart, did not restrain him from allowing the heart to put its case in *Saint Joan*. His Joan is still the virgin soldier-saint; still a romantically heroic figure; still the called-of-God; still the martyred-by-men. Where Shaw departs from—or, rather, adds to—the conventional picture is in endowing Joan with the necessary plain horse-sense of a workaday soldier instead of leaving it to be inferred that her achievements were due to what elsewhere (in the Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*) he had deplored as the officers' customary inclination to sacrifice soldiers' lives in 'romantic exhibitions of conspicuous gallantry'. Joan refers again and again to 'commonsense' as the root cause of her success; and at the trial it is the stupidity of her accusers that appals her, not any wickedness that she discerns in them.

Nevertheless, a saint's common sense wears a different aspect in other eyes; and what a saint dismisses as

stupidity in those who resist him may be the dire necessity of self-preservation. Joan's tragedy was that she represented something more terrible than she could possibly know; a force so terrible that—as the Church then feared and as the world now knows—it could be used for the devil's ends as well as for God's. The Church could not concede to Joan of Arc the right to obey her 'voices' without admitting in principle that any other claimant to divine inspiration might assume such a right. Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, puts the case during his interview with the Earl of Warwick in a tent in the English camp (Scene IV): 'What will the world be like when The Church's accumulated wisdom and knowledge and experience, its councils of learned, venerable pious men, are thrust into the kennel by every ignorant laborer or dairymaid whom the devil can puff up with the monstrous self-conceit of being directly inspired from heaven? It will be a world of blood, of fury, of devastation, of each man striving for his own hand: in the end a world wrecked back into barbarism.' To the individualist (or nonconformist or protestant), institutional pretensions of infallibility are obnoxious and intolerable in every particular; he can obey no ordinance that does not come from his own will, his own intellectual conviction, or the Inner Light which he believes to emanate from God as the directing illuminant of his own conscience. But whether these things are indeed of divine or of satanic origin he can have no sure knowledge. He sets up faith in his ephemeral individual judgement against the age-long collective judgement of the Church; he can do no other, for what he believes to be the will of God working within him must be obeyed whether for salvation or for damnation. Liberty breeds Anarchy; Authority breeds Tyranny.

The only way of escape from Anarchy is into Authority; the only cure for Tyranny is Liberty. This, to the end of time, is the human dilemma, the dilemma propounded in *Saint Joan*. To Cauchon Joan represents a menace to the Church, to Warwick a menace to the feudal system; both are determined that the menace shall be rooted out, and individual taste will choose between the tortuous legalism of the ecclesiastical body and the frank brutalism of the secular arm as the less abominable way with heretics.

For sheer intensity of interest, sustained throughout, none of Shaw's many conversation-pieces excels Scene IV of *Saint Joan*, and it is equalled only by Act III of *Man and Superman* and Act I of *The Doctor's Dilemma*. For sheer dramatic cunning in scene after scene, *Saint Joan* stands apart from the rest of Shaw's works. If his plays from *Arms and the Man* onward are examined his remarkable skill in beginning an opening scene is immediately evident. This skill is nowhere better shown than when the curtain rises on Robert de Baudricourt 'storming terribly at his steward': 'No eggs! No eggs!! Thousand thunders, man, what do you mean by no eggs?' 'Sir: it is not my fault', the Steward protests; 'It is the act of God.' The audience's attention is caught at once by the human situation of the Steward who has been ordered to send 'the girl from Lorraine' back to her father with orders that she is to be given a good hiding, only to find her 'so positive' that he is powerless to get rid of her. Medieval superstition comes in through the Steward's belief that the hens and the cows have been bewitched by the girl as a means of compelling Baudricourt to give her the horse and armour and soldiers he has so far refused. As the scene closes, after an interview between Baudricourt and Joan in which she proves herself

irresistibly persuasive as well as positive, the Steward runs in with a basket of five dozen eggs and cries 'The hens are laying like mad, sir'; Baudricourt, crossing himself, finishes the scene in awed amazement: '... She d i d come from God.'

Not only is Shaw's stagecraft at its best in *Saint Joan*, but, also, the characters have in an uncommon degree that sense of belonging to a larger-than-stage life which is essential to verisimilitude. Nothing handicaps a play more than that the *dramatis personae* should seem to live only from curtain-rise to curtain-fall, having no existence beyond their brief time upon the stage. When they appear thus circumscribed, the characters cannot impress the audience as other than lay-figures who are packed away in a property-cupboard between performances. In *Saint Joan*, even more than in most of Shaw's plays, it is put beyond doubt not only that the characters are being overheard and overseen unawares in these selected moments from their lives, but also that they have interests beyond those with which the play is immediately concerned. For example, the Earl of Warwick's attention is not limited to soldiering and feudal statecraft and the burning of subversive talkers; he is also interested in works of art and has a connoisseur's appreciation of an illuminated manuscript. At the opening of the tent scene he is enjoying himself with a Book of Hours and the scene begins with his aesthetic comment on it: 'Now this is what I call workmanship. There is nothing on earth more exquisite than a bonny book, with well-placed columns of rich black writing in beautiful borders, and illuminated pictures cunningly inset. . . .' It is not so much what is said that creates the effective impression, as the implication in the words that the speaker does really know what he is talking

about. He could not be an intelligent character in a Shaw play, however, without an impish gift of anticlimax, so Warwick continues his observations to the Chaplain by saying: '. . . But nowadays, instead of looking at books, people read them. A book might as well be one of those orders for bacon and bran that you are scribbling.'

The most effective piece of character *creation* in *Saint Joan* is the Dauphin. He may be as much—no more, no less—transcribed from history as any other character in the play, but in terms of drama he is more of an original than the others. Though he is petulant, stupid (yet as shrewd as stupid people often are), cowardly, and in worldly eyes the complete poltroon, he is at the same time a genius, if only a fool of genius with the negative virtue that qualifies him to boast 'I have done less harm than any of you.'

Even the carping could have found little to censure in *Saint Joan* but for the Epilogue, which Shaw defended against the critics by saying in the Preface that he could not be expected to stultify himself by ending with the burning, since Joan's history in the world began rather than ended in Rouen market-place; and the Epilogue records her belated canonization and the ultimate triumph of her spirit. It can be argued that the play reaches its natural climax and consequently its proper end with the curtain-lines of Scene VI. The Executioner comes back after the burning to tell Warwick that as the fire would not consume Joan's heart it had been thrown with the ashes into the river. He concludes: 'You have heard the last of her' but Warwick answers: 'The last of her? Hm! I wonder!' If there had been no Epilogue, however, we should have lost the great litany of praise which Cauchon's ghost begins in the

Dauphin's dream vision—'The girls in the field praise thee; for thou hast raised their eyes; and they see that there is nothing between them and heaven.' Continued by Dunois, The Archbishop, Warwick, de Stogumber, The Inquisitor, The Soldier, and The Executioner, in turn, it ends with The Dauphin's 'The unpretending praise thee, because thou hast taken upon thyself the heroic burdens that are too heavy for them.' Without the Epilogue Joan's final words would also be lacking: 'O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy Saints? How long, O Lord, how long?'

As an act of friendship Shaw undertook in 1922 an English rendering of one of his German translator Siegfried Trebitsch's plays. *Jitta's Atonement* is a very free version of *Frau Gitta's Sühne*, and Shaw acknowledges that he has displaced the romantico-tragic melancholy of the original by comedic common sense. Apart from that there is little in *Jitta's Atonement* to justify its inclusion among the works of Bernard Shaw. Professor Bruno Haldenstedt dies suddenly of angina pectoris in a hired apartment where he is keeping an assignation with Jitta, the wife of his fellow professor Alfred Lenkheim. Haldenstedt tells his mistress during this last meeting that he has put on the title-page of his completed MS. work, *Fetters of the Feminine Psyche*, Lenkheim's name as author, in order to atone posthumously for taking his friend's wife. Jitta escapes from the apartment before Haldenstedt's death is discovered, and his widow and daughter are for differing reasons troubled by their ignorance of the unknown woman's identity. Agnes, the widow, is obsessed by jealous dread that the woman may have succeeded in giving her late husband the intel-

lectual companionship and understanding that she herself was unable to give; and she also fears that the masterpiece she believes him to have written, and which she expected would provide financial support if she were widowed, has been stolen. Edith, Haldenstedt's daughter, wants to find the unknown because she is convinced that the woman must have been wonderful since her father was drawn to her. Jitta tells Agnes enough comforting lies to lead her to believe that the woman was a person of no account; she delights Edith (who has long been fond of Jitta) by telling her the truth. Lenkheim discovers the truth and suppresses the association of his name with the manuscript, saying privately to Jitta: '. . . it's the most utter tommy-rot that was ever put forward as a serious contribution to psychology. . . . I may be an idiot; but my idiocy is the accepted idiocy taught in the University at which I am a professor; and his idiocy is not taught anywhere. . . .' He agrees to edit the book, however, with Haldstedt's name restored, and tells no one but Jitta his real opinion of it. The play ends with the still-deceived Agnes saying of Jitta after her departure with Lenkheim, 'She's too good for him.' The best lines come a little earlier. Jitta tells her husband that Edith has described him as a chump. Lenkheim cheerfully and sensibly agrees: 'All husbands are chumps, dear, after the first month or so. Jolly good thing for their wives too, sometimes.'

When Shaw published this translation in 1926, he included in the volume (*Translations and Tomfooleries*) six short pieces of his own, belonging to various dates from 1901 to 1914. The half-title describes these collectively as 'Trifles and Tomfooleries'. The first, *The Admirable Bashville; or, Constancy Unrewarded* is a dramatic

version in blank verse of his fourth novel (*Cashel Byron's Profession*). He explains that he used blank verse because, under the copyright law then prevailing, he had only a week in which to prepare a stage version: 'blank verse is so childishly easy and expeditious' that it enabled him to do within the week what, in prose, would have taken him a month. This stage version of the novel was rushed out to forestall and protect the author's copyright against an unauthorized American adaptation which had been mooted. Although Shaw, with mock solemnity, gave high marks to his own blank verse, called certain Elizabethans in evidence in the Preface, and did not disdain to borrow assorted lines from Shakespeare, *The Admirable Bashville* is in fact a lark and, allowing for its more humdrum subject (love and prize-fighting), it might be set up as the prototype of Max Beerbohm's *Savonarola Brown*.

Press Cuttings, described as 'A Topical Sketch compiled from the Editorial and Correspondence Columns of the Daily Papers during the Women's War in 1909', is a farcical by-product of the female suffrage agitation around that date. The militant suffragists adopted many devices to call general attention to their demand for the parliamentary franchise: they set fire to letter-boxes, threw themselves in the path of horses at race-meetings, shouted down leading politicians at public meetings, created uproar in parliament, and repeatedly chained and padlocked themselves to railings in the neighbourhood of Whitehall. In *Press Cuttings*, the Prime Minister, Balsquith (Balfour+Asquith), doubting his ability to get from Downing Street to the upper part of Whitehall without being pursued by suffragettes, disguises himself as a woman and chains himself to the door-scraper outside the War Office, sending the key of his padlock to

General Mitchener in a sealed envelope with a note asking to be released and conducted to the General's office. In that mood the playlet proceeds, introducing a comic orderly who cheeks the General, two comic women officials of the Anti-Suffraget League, and a comic charwoman whom the General decides to marry. The dialogue between various members of the group introduces many current topics which, though discussed in a farcical atmosphere, have an underlying seriousness. There is at least one speech which, even in the trough of absurdity, illustrates Shaw's way of being often a long jump ahead of contemporary thought. In this piece, written in 1909, Balsquith is unimpressed by Mitchener's statement that the absolute command of the sea is essential to British security; when asked whether we are to live without security Balsquith answers: 'Yes. There's no such thing as security in the world; and there never can be as long as men are mortal. England will be secure when England is dead, just as the streets of London will be safe when there's no longer a man in her streets to be run over or a vehicle to run over him. When you military chaps ask for security you are crying for the moon.' This theme—of living dangerously—is implicit in some of Captain Shotover's speeches in *Heartbreak House*, and it is taken up again explicitly in Act I of *Too True to be Good* by Aubrey Bagot (posing as a burglar): '. . . what sense is there in this world of hazards, disasters, elations and victories, except as a field for the adventures of the life everlasting? In vain do we disfigure our streets with scrawls of Safety First: in vain do the nations clamor for Security, security, security. They who cry Safety First never cross the street: the empires which sacrifice life to security find it in the grave.'

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Nothing much emerges from *The Glimpse of Reality: A Tragedietta*, set outside an Italian lakeside inn in the fifteenth century. The innkeeper's daughter needs thirty crowns as a dowry to enable her to marry a young fisherman, and the couple and her father intend to extort the money from the youthful Count Ferruccio by threatening to kill him. Ferruccio learns of this plot from the girl herself when he comes to the inn disguised as a friar. After he reveals his identity she terrifies him with a convincing threat of death which makes him see himself as hitherto a 'spoilt cub': 'When I believe in everything that is real as I believed for that moment in death, then I shall be a man at last.' The metaphysical note does not ring true in this atmosphere, and the experiment (made in 1909) demonstrated Shaw's unfitness for cloak-and-dagger stuff.

Passion, Poison, and Petrification, or, The Fatal Gazogene: A Brief Tragedy for Barns and Booths, Shaw's contribution to the 1905 theatrical garden-party in Regent's Park for the benefit of the Actors' Orphanage, is a piece of intentionally uproarious clowning. *The Fascinating Foundling: A Disgrace to the Author* (1909) concerns an encounter in the Lord Chancellor's Office between Harold Brabazon in search of a wife who will provide him with a good home influence and Anastasia Vulliamy in search of a husband she can gather to her breast and bully. *The Music-Cure: A Piece of Utter Nonsense* (1914), written as 'a Variety Turn for two musicians', introduces Lord Reginald Fitzambey (whose opening dialogue with his doctor is an echo of the Marconi shares scandal which was agitating politicians and journalists at that time) and Strega Thundridge, 'the female Paderewski'. The neurotic youth has from childhood had a secret longing

'to be mercilessly beaten by a splendid, strong, beautiful woman', while Strega has been pursued by a dream of 'a timid little heart fluttering against mine'. The piece ends with the two playing a wedding-march duet on the piano and with the amused audience possibly wondering whether there is a psychiatric joke embedded in the nonsense.

Though some of the plays of Shaw's final period, 1932-49, may be given higher rank in the future than they received in his lifetime, there is unlikely to be any serious dissent from the contemporary opinion that *The Apple Cart* was his last major play. Subsequent to its first production (in Warsaw, then in London) in 1929 the miseries of Nazism and other brands of tyranny imposed themselves upon the world, and there were attempts to interpret *The Apple Cart* as an apologia for dictatorship. Apart from the fact that a liking for dictators could not coexist with the salutary sense of the ridiculous which was instinctive in Shaw, there is no ground for reading into a criticism of parliamentary democracy a manifesto of its opposite. The real weakness of *The Apple Cart* arises from the occupational risk to which all creative writers are liable: namely, the chance that a character may take on an over-vigorous independent existence and throw the completed work out of balance. King Magnus is such a character, and in consequence his antagonists, the Cabinet Ministers, are below his own mental stature and are too easily outwitted. If this were only a disadvantage to *The Apple Cart* when viewed as a political tract—the author called it 'a political extravaganza'—the weakness would be of little moment, for the play will outlive any partisan significance that may be wished on to it. But it is a weakness

which detracts from the dramatic force and human interest of the play, for conflict between unequally equipped opponents cannot hold the audience's attention at full stretch.

While full weight should be given to the word 'extravaganza' in the sub-title, since parts of *The Apple Cart* are designedly farcical and wildly improbable, there is nevertheless much that provokes serious thought. Modern democrats are peculiarly sensitive to criticism from within the family, and the sayings that sting in this play may be dismissed too hastily as prejudiced or groundless. Democracy is no more immune to error and corruption than any other human institution. The conflict in *The Apple Cart* as Magnus sees it is not between democracy and absolutism but between opportunism and principle. His Cabinet retain power, he says, by pretending that what they do is done by the will of the people, 'who, God knows, never dreamt of it . . . whereas, for what a king does, he, and he alone, is held responsible. A demagogue may steal a horse where a king dare not look over a hedge.' Rather than yield up his power of veto, which he regards as the country's one remaining bulwark against 'the tyranny of popular ignorance and popular poverty', Magnus declares that he will abdicate immediately after reducing himself to the rank of a commoner, and then become a parliamentary candidate at the next election. Foreseeing that as a fellow M.P. he will be more formidable than as king, the Prime Minister abandons the demand for the surrender of the royal veto and thus concedes the right implied in Magnus's earlier question: 'If I see you leading the nation over the edge of a precipice may I not warn it?'

As much objection has been made to the Interlude between the two acts of *The Apple Cart* as to the Epilogue

in *Saint Joan*, though it is difficult to see reason in the argument that the Interlude is irrelevant and intrusive. The objection could only be sustained on the assumption that a king must have a political life but no personal life. The Interlude shows an aspect of Magnus's personal life, and not a disreputable one, for he speaks to Orinthia of their 'strangely innocent relations'; and when she refers to the queen, his wife, as a cabbage and herself as a rose, he asks: '. . . what wise man, if you force him to choose between doing without roses and doing without cabbages, would not secure the cabbages? Besides,' he adds, 'all these old married cabbages were once roses; and, though young things like you dont remember that, their husbands do. . . .' Even if there were any sound reason for regarding the Interlude as an excrescence, Orinthia is such a superb acting part (Edith Evans's performance in the original English production was an unforgettable masterpiece of high comedy), and there is so much genuine homely wisdom in Magnus's lines, that as a separate one-act play it would qualify to be placed among Shaw's best works. No sounder advice for lovers and husbands and wives has ever been spoken than this by Magnus to Orinthia: 'Do not let us fall into the common mistake of expecting to become one flesh and one spirit. Every star has its own orbit; and between it and its nearest neighbor there is not only a powerful attraction but an infinite distance. When the attraction becomes stronger than the distance the two do not embrace: they crash together in ruin. We two also have our orbits, and must keep an infinite distance between us to avoid a disastrous collision. Keeping our distance is the whole secret of good manners; and without good manners human society is intolerable and impossible.'

Magnus, one of Shaw's most successful creations, has wisdom and humour and a teasing wit, as well as a remarkable gift of irony, which is at its best in his early conversation with Boanerges. The fun of the play is completely unleashed in the scene in Act II with the American Ambassador, who comes to announce the decision of the United States to rejoin the British Empire; while its most movingly serious passage is the Powermistress Royal's bitter attack on Breakages, Limited.

In play after play Shaw ran counter gloriously to the theory that excellence in literary composition depends upon the rigorous exclusion of inessentials. The truth is that natural writing (i.e. writing that does not expose whatever art or artifice might have gone into its making) does not strip itself of inessentials; though what is essential and what inessential cannot be decided by rule of thumb. No doubt the conversation between the king's two Private Secretaries at the beginning of *The Apple Cart* is an example of what Walter Pater in his essay on Style called 'surplusage'. It could be removed, a purist would say, without loss to the play; but that would be a fallacious judgement. What Sempronius's deceased father was or did has nothing to do with what comes later in *The Apple Cart*; that is true. Yet from the moment Pamphilius catches the ear of the audience with his somewhat eccentrically startling first words: 'What was your father?' the play grows organically. These are men talking; while they talk we are unaware of them as actors acting; unaware, also, of the author building up his play. And what good talk it is! and how directly it penetrates, without appearing to do so, to the heart of one of the social tragedies of the modern age. For the case of Sempronius's father is the case of

millions: 'He couldnt bear to be alone for a moment; it was death to him. . . .' When he was cast away on an uninhabited island off the coast of Scotland he did die, 'simply from having no one to play cards with, and no church to go to'.

Chapter Eleven

LAST PLAYS: 1931-1949

Too True to be Good (1931); *Village Wooing* (1933); *On the Rocks* (1933); *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (1934); *The Six of Calais* (1934); *The Millionairess* (1936); *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937); *Geneva* (1938); 'In Good King Charles's Golden Days' (1939); *Buoyant Billions* (1947); *Farfetched Fables* (1948); *Shakes versus Shav* (1949)

IN a country whose native literature has never conformed to rules it was singularly inappropriate that critics should have said so often, as each new addition to Shaw's dramatic works reached the stage, 'This is not a play.' If this comment meant that no one in it was murdered, no one seduced, no one's shady past exploited, no hearts romantically broken, no one wrongfully accused of forgery or other crime, no one physically assaulted, then the critics were almost entirely right. But if, on the other hand, the comment was intended to suggest that the play did not present convincing human beings in possible and interesting human situations, engaged in mental or spiritual conflict that holds the audience's attention, then the critics were nearly always wrong. If the implication was that Shaw was technically inefficient in the stage management of his characters, that the dialogue lacked substance or tension, or that there were serious structural defects, then the critics

were more often wrong than right, at least until Shaw's final period, after *The Apple Cart*.

When weighing the critics' opinions against Shaw's performance as a playwright it is necessary to remember that innovations in any branch of activity are outrageous to all but the few in any generation who are endowed with exploratory and elastic minds. If it were not so, we should all waste our lives in pursuit of every new thing, every fad and fashion, and anarchy and chaos would result. The onus must rest upon innovators to prove themselves; while upon the public rests a double obligation—to avoid the lazy temptation to shutter the mind, and to resist the immediate snob appeal of whatever is new. Shaw's leading principle applies to Shaw's own works as to all else; the principle that can be condensed into a summary paraphrase: *Test everything; take nothing on trust at second hand*. Or, even more summarily: *Is it true? does it work?*

While, therefore, justification can be found for the early critics' inability or disinclination to receive Shaw either as thinker or as playwright, the long persistence of this attitude among dramatic and also academic critics was one more demonstration of the English professional thinkers' reluctance to think. The public was enjoying Shaw's plays long before either journalists or intellectuals admitted them to be either enjoyable or plays, and Shaw was already among the Immortals before some of his contemporaries had ceased to treat him as an interloper on the literary scene.

By 1930, at least fifteen of Shaw's forty-one plays could be reckoned as lasting material for actors and audiences and for teachers and students. He was then seventy-four years old and had long since partaken in brimming measure of whatever satisfaction fame and

wealth could provide to one whose tastes and desires ranged from the unextravagant to the ascetic. In his achievements as a playwright he was second only to Shakespeare, and second to none in English prose drama. Political folly and ineptitude had seemed since 1914 to be heading humanity towards the abyss and he had more than once in his plays held up a mirror in which the twentieth century might see itself and take heed. What more was there for him to do? In the Preface written in 1947 for *Buoyant Billions* he said: ' . . . I cannot hold my tongue or my pen. As long as I live I must write. If I stopped writing I should die for want of something to do.' But if he continued to write for writing's sake he nearly always found something worth writing about and something worth saying. He retained to the end his interest as an observer and his sapience as a commentator; the plays of his last period contain numerous passages equal to his earlier best. These are, however, *disjecta membra*. The grand old tree was parting with its leaves; the organism was losing its impulse to co-ordinate and unify.

This dwindling of what in terms of the playwright's craft may be called structural ability had been apparent intermittently in the later plays of Shaw's maturity. The last act of *Heartbreak House* disintegrates in its final moments and in so doing causes the play to fall short of being Shaw's best. That *Back to Methuselah* fails to be what its author intended and wished to believe it to be—one of the half-dozen or so supreme masterpieces of world literature—is due to the fundamental weakness of structure in its five parts and to the failure to weld the parts into a quintuplicate whole.

In retrospect it can be seen that by the time Shaw wrote *Too True to be Good* he had ceased to concern him-

self with the formalities of playwriting because they had ceased to interest him. He watched life going by and said and wrote what he thought about it. And since what he thought was invariably absorbing and entertaining it was worth while hearing his thoughts spoken from the stage. No longer, however, did he command enough procreative mental energy to enable him to give life to characters with an independent being capable of acting their author off the stage—as all really successful characters do. He could only fabricate simulacra, through whose mouths he was at least able when required to project words different from his own as a challenge to his own; and as occasion might require he could lend them voices unlike his own. He was still capable of prophetic fervour and eloquence, of wit and humour, of fun and foolery; he could still provide richer entertainment than any other living dramatist, young or old; but the entertainment had become discontinuous and dull patches were apt to be part and parcel of each new play.

Too True to be Good seems too elaborately contrived for the substance it is required to carry, and there is little in it that had not been expressed more memorably by Shaw earlier. It is probably unique among the world's plays, however, in having as one of its characters a microbe (called *The Monster*) of German measles; a microbe, moreover, that accuses *The Patient* of infecting *it* with the disease. *The Patient*, one of 'the idle rich'—then a more familiar social phenomenon than members of that class have since become—has for mother a stupid and tiresome fussier who fears any breath of fresh air as a deadly peril to her daughter. Attending the patient as night nurse is an ex-chambermaid in league with an ex-clergyman turned burglar. She

admits The Burglar to the sickroom as part of their plan to steal The Patient's pearls, a plan that is modified when The Patient falls in love at first sight with The Burglar. They then decide that The Patient shall 'steal' her own necklace so that The Burglar may sell it to provide funds for the three of them to go abroad, pretending that The Patient has been kidnapped, and demanding a ransom from her wealthy mother. The Shavian reason for this farcically improbable arrangement is that The Patient ought by hook or by crook to prise herself free from her silly mother. The Burglar, harking back to his pulpit days, meditates: 'What a theme for a sermon! The well brought up maiden revolts against her respectable life. The aspiring soul escapes from home, sweet home, which, as a wellknown author [Shaw himself] has said, is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse.'

The other two acts take place in a desert country where a comic stage Colonel, Tallboys, supposes himself to be leading an expeditionary force 'sent out to suppress brigandage in this district and to rescue a British lady who is being held to ransom'. Tallboys' dispatch rider, Private Meek, attracted more attention than any other character when the play was first produced for he was understood to be a fictional representation of Shaw's friend Colonel T. E. Lawrence of Arabia, who had subsequently changed his name to T. E. Shaw and re-enlisted as an aircraftman. Meek is depicted as the complete soldier and intellectual handyman, efficient in everything, and acting not only as dispatch rider, but also as interpreter, quartermaster's clerk, and intelligence orderly. The 'brigands' are The Nurse (called Sweetie and now masquerading as Countess Valbrioni) and The Burglar (now become the Hon. Aubrey Bagot).

The Patient accompanies them disguised as a native servant. Later, The Patient's mother, Mrs. Mopply, comes in search of her daughter; Aubrey's father (The Elder) a 'Godfearing atheist' is found living as a hermit in the desert; and there is a philosophical Sergeant Fielding devoted to the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Apart from a little simple knockabout fun and some rough verbal clowning, the rest of the play is mainly given over to speeches from The Sergeant, The Elder, and Aubrey, though The Patient, too, has moments of eloquence which register her conversion from invalidism and emotional enslavement by her mother: '. . . There should be no mothers; there should be only women, strong women able to stand by themselves, not clingers. I would kill all the clingers. Mothers cling: daughters cling: we are all like drunken women clinging to lamp posts: none of us stands upright.'

Village Wooing concerns the author of the Marco Polo Series of Chatty Guide Books and a village shop assistant and telephone operator who meet on a pleasure liner as a consequence of her having won first prize in a newspaper competition. She is determined to get on conversational terms with him, though he writes continuously while on deck and does his utmost to rebuff her. Half a year afterwards they meet again when he goes by chance into the Wiltshire village post office where she works. She induces him to buy the shop from the old lady who owns it, and in the third and last scene, three months later, the girl is able to boast that she has turned him into a decent shopkeeper, though she finds it harder to persuade him to agree to turn himself into her husband. Except for a few excursions into metaphysical speechmaking by the man (which pass unpro-

ductively over the young woman's head), this 'Comedietina for Two Voices' keeps close to personal and domestic issues. Z (the girl) is a likelife replica of the universal female natterer and verbal limpet; but Shaw saw farther than most victims of this type, and recognized that above a restless tongue there may be a commonsense brain and below it a kind and comforting heart—and, in Z's case, a steely determination to get her man. Among the shrewdest pieces of observation in this playlet is the noting of A's masculine irritation at Z's tricks of speech: namely, her reiteration by unconscious habit of 'Thanks very much'; and her way of turning simple statements into nerve-grating questions. Teasing him in the shop about his failure to remember her, she mentions casually the liner on which they met. When he remarks at the coincidence that he also was on that boat, Z asks if he suffers from loss of memory and, to his reply that he never forgets anything, responds: 'Oh, then it can't be you, can it?' 'A. There! Can it? That woman always finished up with can it? wont it? isnt it? so that you had to answer her out of common politeness. Take care never to pick up that trick or you will be murdered some day.' A critically instructive essay could be written on Shaw's use of the minutiae of domestic and personal habit in speech and conduct as one of the devices which give life and verisimilitude to his plays. (See below, page 186.)

Mass unemployment, street demonstrations by the workless, the British coalition government in which the Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and the Conservative Opposition leader Stanley Baldwin united to deal jointly with the economic collapse in the early 1930s, and the increasing drift towards absolutism abroad

—these events form the background against which the political implications of *On the Rocks* have to be considered. As a play it requires little comment that would not arise more pertinently from its Preface, for the characters have little independent interest as human beings: they exist to conduct the argument, the argument does not arise from, nor is it shaped by, any personal strength or weakness in the characters. They are, that is to say, manufactured characters, not living ones. If any exception at all need be made to this generalization it is only in regard to the old Labour leader Hipney, who comes with a deputation to the Prime Minister and stays afterwards to tell the great man privately some home-truths about the working classes.

On the Rocks, by failing to communicate dramatic intensity to its subject matter, demonstrates that plain argument is likely to be more effective in essay form on the printed page than in dialogue form on the stage. If the characters in a play are devoid of that individual magic which is called personality it is next to impossible to listen with interest to whatever words they speak. There is no shortage of sense in *On the Rocks*, no lack of urgent importance in what is said; yet the play is as near to being an unrelieved bore as it was possible for Shaw to achieve. There would be no purpose in dwelling upon this if it did not throw into higher relief the extraordinary nature of Shaw's achievement as a whole. The truth is that 'the drama of ideas' is a shallow rooted weed in the playwrights' garden. When it appears as something better than a weed, the superiority comes from the particular playwright's infusion of genuine drama, to which for stage purposes ideas must be secondary and incidental. In the theatre Shaw's great-

ness was determined by his stature as a dramatic artist, not by the quality or importance of his views—except in so far as it is impossible to conceive that good art can come from shoddy material any more than that goodness in men can come from shoddy principles.

Examined alongside *The Apple Cart*, *On the Rocks* appears to be the revamping of a similar political theme. If it is considered as *The Apple Cart* upset and with Magnus and Orinthia tipped out, the indispensability of really live characters as media for ideas in drama is demonstrated beyond cavil. In *The Apple Cart* the urgent question 'Is Democracy fit to govern itself or must it be governed?' is brought home as a human problem; in *On the Rocks* it remains a dialectical abstraction.

To write with perfect clarity for nearly half a century and through a period rife with obscurity, is a rare intellectual feat which could hardly be overpraised. Since Bernard Shaw had performed this extraordinary feat, there is little need to make much of his lapse from clarity in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, a Day-of-Judgment play. In the last two decades of his life Shaw experienced a growing conviction that mankind was altogether unready to live by the cold clear light of reason; and that until such time as universal adulthood was attained teachers and preachers could not dispense with the picture language of myth and fable. He essayed something of the kind in the concluding part of *Back to Methuselah*, and again, with a different mythology, in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*. But Shaw was no fabler or mythologer. He could not find his way in the half-lit world of allegory and symbol where immediate obscurity is permitted in the service of ultimate enlightenment. *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* is not

obscure; it is merely confused. This must be said with some reserve, however, lest the point of the play has been missed—a possibility which does not in this instance call for any apology to the author. One of the characters says: 'We mustnt pretend to be omniscient. Even God would not be omniscient if He read the newspapers.' The play is like a muddled though not unpleasant nightmare after much reading of newspapers. Some part refers to group-marriage, some part to the British Empire; and it is nearly three-quarters over before an Angel of the Judgment appears to announce that the Day of Judgment is a protracted affair marking not the end of the world 'but the end of its childhood and the beginning of its responsible maturity'. After the Angel has flown away, large numbers of people start to disappear—only fourteen members of the House of Commons are left but fifty of the House of Lords, 'not one of them has ever attended a meeting of the Chamber'. 'The angels are weeding the garden. The useless people, the mischievous people, the selfish somebodies and the noisy nobodies, are dissolving into space. . . . 'The lives which have no use, no meaning, no purpose, will fade out. We shall have to justify our existences or perish. We shall live under a constant sense of that responsibility. If the angels fail us we shall set up tribunals of our own from which worthless people will not come out alive. When men no longer fear the judgment of God, they must learn to judge themselves.'

. . 'Judgment is valuation. Civilizations live by their valuations. If the valuations are false, the civilization perishes as all the ancient ones we know of old did. We are not being punished today: we are being valued. That is the Newest Dispensation.' These three quotations come from three different characters, but Shaw

no longer cared to differentiate in tone between one voice and another. He here presents an antiphonal sermon. Good though it is as a sermon, the attention of the congregation is largely dissipated by the long-drawn-out preliminary irrelevancies.

Written for performance at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park, London, *The Six of Calais* was nicely contrived for the circumstances in which it was likely to be played. Angry Edward III and recalcitrant Peter Hardmouth (Piers de Rosty, one of the burghers delegated to abase themselves before Edward when surrendering the keys of the starved town) provide a fair amount of loud speaking to combat the extraneous noises of a park, and the king's solicitous words to his pregnant Queen Philippa—'Is it wise to come into the cold air here? Had they better not bring a brazier and some cushions, and a hot drink . . .'—have a sly obliquity for an audience outfacing the frigidity of an English summer evening. This playlet was designed purely as an acting piece with no message or moral; but Shaw was at pains to challenge the spectators with a King patently unlike a twentieth-century English king, both in his brutal bluster and in his slobbering tearfulness, while the dialogue has more substance and vigour than other authors of one-act historical trifles are accustomed to provide.

After a very funny first act *The Millionairess* fades out through the remaining three acts. It opens with Mrs. Alastair Fitzfassenden (*née* Epifania Ognisanti di Parerga), who inherited thirty million pounds from her father, calling upon a young solicitor, Julius Sagamore, to make her will before she commits suicide. She plans to leave the whole fortune to her husband, whose impressive

physique and prowess as amateur tennis champion and heavy-weight boxer had led her to imagine mistakenly that he would be an ardent lover. Discovering that she is a domineering and hasty-tempered woman, he knocks her out with a blow on the solar plexus during their honeymoon. One condition in her will is to be that within a month following his wife's funeral Alastair must marry his girl friend Patricia Smith (pet-named Polly Seedystockings), for Epifania is convinced that the money and Polly together will quickly ride him to the devil and avenge her disappointment. The solicitor having provided her with a prescription for poison, Epifania changes her mind about suicide, and before the will can be drafted Alastair and Polly, and, a little later, Adrian Blenderbland (described by Polly as Epifania's 'Sunday husband') also call on the solicitor. Polly Seedystockings, '*a pleasant quiet little woman of the self-supporting type*', has more genuine sense and feeling than any of the others and it is fitting that she should make the best speech of the play: '. . . There are two sorts of people in the world: the people anyone can live with and the people that no one can live with. The people that no one can live with may be very good-looking and vital and splendid and temperamental and romantic and all that; . . . but if you try to live with them they just eat up your whole life running after them or quarrelling or attending to them one way and another: you cant call your soul your own. . . .' In the second act Epifania and Adrian quarrel in a dismal riverside inn, The Pig and Whistle, and she knocks him downstairs. The noise brings on to the scene an Egyptian doctor whom Epifania at once attempts to annex as her personal medical man. Failing in that she proposes to marry him after divorcing Alastair. When he makes a similar condi-

tion to the one her father's will had imposed on any of her male suitors—that she shall make a fortune in six months by her own efforts from an initial allowance of thirty-five shillings—she goes, in Act III, to a tailor's sweat-shop in east London and takes over the business. She also works as chambermaid at the riverside inn where she met the Egyptian doctor and in due course becomes its owner, refurbishing and renaming it *The Cardinal's Hat*; there (Act IV), the play ends with the doctor falling in love with Epifania's pulse. There is nothing to add to Shaw's statement that 'The Millionairess does not pretend to be anything more than a comedy of humorous and curious contemporary characters such as Ben Jonson might write were he alive now. . . '.

Recollections of Irving's revival of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* had persuaded Shaw that the last act was 'a cobbled-up version by several hands' unworthy of the rest of the play. After he had undertaken to rewrite it he realized that what Irving performed was not what Shakespeare wrote and that the act 'is genuine Shakespeare to the last full stop'. Nevertheless, Shaw proceeded with his undertaking, calling it *Cymbeline Refinished: A Variation on Shakespeare's Ending*. His claim that since childhood Shakespearean blank verse had been to him 'as natural a form of literary expression as the Augustan English' prose to which he was brought up in Dublin is not supported by the evidence, and nothing was added to Shaw's reputation by preserving *Cymbeline Refinished*.

In its own field *Geneva* is the most important of Shaw's political documents. Its importance, however, is almost

wholly political and historical; its literary interest does not go beyond the quality of its prose, which is as excellent as the prose of Shaw's Prefaces. *Geneva* can, in fact, be most suitably regarded as a Preface in dialogue. The characters express a number of opposing principles and attitudes arising from the political turmoil of the 1920s and 1930s. The first three acts are merely preparatory to the last act, in which Bombardone (Mussolini), Battler (Hitler), and Flanco (Franco) come to be arraigned before the International Court at The Hague. *Geneva* is of necessity an exhibition of political chess in which the moves must be preordained. If it were to be judged by the rules of playmaking (and the inappropriateness of so doing needs no emphasis) it would fail through the impossibility of surmounting an incredible major assumption. It is necessary to assume that the three dictators would have obeyed a summons to appear before the Court; but since no act of the imagination can cover such an assumption, and the author does not oblige us to any willing suspension of disbelief for stage purposes, the leading characters have no dramatic significance and as a play *Geneva* breaks on that obstacle.

The last direct sunset gleams of Shaw's mind lighted up '*In Good King Charles's Golden Days*', where, with some conscious straining of probability and some adjustment of dates, he assembles in Isaac Newton's house at Cambridge Charles II and his brother James, George Fox, Nell Gwynn, Barbara Villiers, Louise de Keroualle, with Newton's housekeeper Mrs. Basham and his maid-servant Sally in attendance. The main purpose of the piece is to rehabilitate Charles as an intelligent and in most respects worthy person as against the popular opinion of him as a wenching trifler. It sparkles from

first to last with good conversation on science and art, religion and kingcraft, and the function of wives and mistresses. A brief second act introduces Catherine of Braganza, Charles's queen, as the woman he loves and respects above all others.

Buoyant Billions, with the chill of the afterglow upon it, was the last of Shaw's plays to have a public London production in his lifetime. As a play it lacks cogency and dramatic tension and is disfigured by some of the author's most tiresome flippancies. Isolated speeches display flashes of the old light and heat of argument, however, and most remarkable of all, in an age of whimpering moral and spiritual dejection, is the optimism which runs through the play. The Son says of the atomic bomb, 'It will make world bettering possible. It will begin by ridding the world of the anopheles mosquito, the tsetse fly, the white ant, and the locust.' And again: 'When atom splitting makes it as easy for us to support ourselves as well by two hours work as now by two years, we shall move mountains and straighten rivers in a hand's turn. Then the problem of what to do in our spare time will make life enormously more interesting. No more doubt as to whether life is worth living. Then the world betterers will come to their own.'

Farfetched Fables, which followed *Buoyant Billions*, is hardly more than six scraps of automatic writing devoid of dramatic interest and with only fragmentary echoes from earlier plays and prefaces. Then came *Shakes versus Shav*, a ten-minute puppet play written by request to employ two figures sent to Shaw by 'our chief living puppet master' (Waldo Lanchester) and performed at

the 1949 Malvern Festival. This trifle—Shaw's 53rd and final play—mainly fisticuffs and backchat, has a point of interest in the reply to Shakes's challenge:

Where is thy Hamlet? Couldst thou write King Lear?

Shav answers:

Aye, with his daughters all complete. Couldst thou
Have written Heartbreak House? Behold my Lear.

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While this book was going through the press in the middle part of 1951 the unique and valuable complete presentation by Alec Clunes at the Arts Theatre, London, of Shaw's eighteen one-act plays confirmed earlier impressions of the importance of *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* in the whole body of his work and the skill, wit, and forceful eloquence of *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. But the most notable success of this Arts Theatre season was *Village Wooing*, which Brenda Bruce and Maurice Denham revealed as a little masterpiece of comedic insight and human understanding in a production (directed by Roy Rich) which achieved perfect interpretation of the author's text by both players. Brenda Bruce's still, sensitively beautiful, and deeply moving characterization discovered the tenderness as well as the inflexibility of Z, and is here recorded as a rare instance of genuine creative acting.

Chapter Twelve

PREFACES AND POLITICAL WRITINGS

EXCEPT for a few allusions and factual references, Shaw's Prefaces have here been passed over in the chapters on his plays. Shaw set great store by these Prefaces; they are an important part of his total writings, and they are a splendid addition to modern English prose literature; yet it is desirable that they should not be looked upon as an indispensable adjunct to his plays, and important that they should not be used as a buttress for the plays. A play must be an independent entity on the stage; it must be wholly intelligible through its own dialogue and action, without explication from any source whatsoever beyond the bounds of the stage. The author or any commentator may write 'about' it in any other form without let or hindrance, provided that anything so written is agreed to have no pertinence to the play, but to be only a separate exercise in another medium. Shaw's Prefaces have in fact little vital connection with the plays; they are seldom other than a set of variations upon a theme or themes in the play they precede. Sometimes, indeed, it is not easy to find the link between a particular preface and the play which follows.

Shaw was himself aware of all this. In his Introduction to the 1934 one-volume edition of the Prefaces—after describing them as a series of pamphlets and essays on political and social problems which ought by that time to have been out of date but were no more so than the

Gospels or More's *Utopia*, or Fielding's *Tom Jones*, or Dickens's *Little Dorrit*—he concluded with a reminder to critics that 'the prefaces to my plays have nothing to do with the theatre'. He traces back to Dryden the practice of 'weighting volumes of plays with political and philosophical disquisitions' and makes a pretence to believe that his own motive in prefacing was nothing but a wish 'to give my customers good value for their money'.

The truth is, of course, that the Prefaces were a substitute pulpit from which Shaw, being an irrepressible orator, delivered himself of exposition and of prophecy upon nearly everything that was in the collective mind of the three generations which his own lifetime spanned. If it should ever again be possible to bring out a one-volume edition, there would be a particular advantage in adopting a chronological arrangement instead of grouping the Prefaces under subject-headings: Sociological; Political; Religious; Autobiographical and Professional. While there is some convenience in this labelled-boxes method of presentation, more light is thrown upon the author and the movement of his mind if the Prefaces are taken in the order of publication.

One may be tempted to say that a chronological reading shows the *development*, rather than only the *movement*, of Shaw's mind; but that is a temptation which should be resisted, for a peculiarity of his mind was that it appeared to be fully developed almost as soon as consciousness dawned. His writings show a development of technique and control of his literary medium and, through the early stages, a growing confidence. The critical faculty, however, the ability to assess and evaluate human behaviour and institutions which is the

stamp of mental maturity, is hardly less evident in Shaw's first novel at the age of twenty-three than in *The Apple Cart* written when he was seventy-three. There must be no wanton misreading of this statement, nor any inference from it that Shaw was mentally arrested; nor was he emotionally arrested. The mentally and emotionally arrested generations came after. His mental endowment was profuse, precocious, and hardy; his emotional endowment limited yet adult.

He was accustomed to say that most people find truth the hardest thing to believe, and that his own reputation as a perverse paradoxer derived from his practice of speaking the truth in season and out of season. This, in turn, was also taken to be a paradox, or as merely a further example of Shavian self-conceit. Yet it is not impossible that Shaw was right about himself, at least some of the time; and the sensible reader will keep in mind the possibility that at least some of Shaw's seemingly outrageous assertions are statements of literal truth. The critical faculty in ourselves should work both ways: it must be as apt to affirm as to deny; and it must keep a sturdy humility in reserve when venturing, as it is desirable that it should sometimes venture, to doubt the wisdom of the wise.

Shaw claimed to possess no other wisdom than the wisdom of normality. It seems a modest claim, though it was in truth revolutionary. He had progressed no further than the second paragraph of his second preface ('Mainly About Myself', *Plays Unpleasant*, 1898) when he gave the well-known account of his visit to an ophthalmic surgeon for a sight test: 'He . . . informed me that [my eyesight] was quite uninteresting to him because it was normal.' Shaw interpreted this to mean that his sight was like everybody's; but the oculist,

explaining that *normal sight meant the power to see things accurately*, said that only ten per cent of the population had normal sight, against ninety per cent abnormal. In this fact Shaw believed he saw the reason of his failure to win acceptance as a novelist: 'My mind's eye, like my body's, was "normal": it saw things differently from other people's eyes, and saw them better.' This conclusion has been regarded as either humorous or conceited. But suppose it is neither; suppose it is a plain statement of a plain fact. Suppose Shaw *was* more often right than wrong, even when the majority abused him and a minority quietly believed him wrong. Suppose truth really *was* his guerdon and expediency ours. . . . It would make a difference.

Shaw's earliest Preface is less known than most of the others, even though it is in the one-volume edition, for it comes from the rare first edition of *Widowers' Houses* (1893). Included in it is William Archer's account of how he first encountered Shaw in the Reading Room of the British Museum studying, day after day for weeks, two books—the French edition of Karl Marx's *Capital* and the orchestral score of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Archer tells with humour how he started Shaw on the road to playwriting and how Shaw took his own road and, seven years later, finished *Widowers' Houses*. The preface (i.e. Shaw's own part of it) holds considerable literary and critical as well as sociological interest, since it speaks of the author's aims in writing the play and of his claims for the finished article: 'It is a propagandist play—a didactic play—a play with a purpose' but 'you will please judge it, not as a pamphlet in dialogue, but as in intention a work of art as much as any comedy of Molière's. . . .' There are two appendices: one, the

author's address to his fellow critics, with passages from press notices of the play; two, extracts from letters to the author about the play. This material is valuable as literary history, for it gives posterity the opportunity of knowing how Shaw's first theatre audience reacted to a kind of play that was new and strange.

What determined Shaw to become a professional playwright is set out in the Preface to *Plays Unpleasant*, and as this volume contained *Mrs. Warren's Profession* there is also a preliminary statement of Shaw's case against the moral pretensions of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays in the performance of his function as censor. This official—whatever might be from time to time his personal identity—was to remain for many years a source of provocation and an object of derision to Shaw, whose intermittent attacks culminated in the Preface (1910) to *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*, which describes with a sunny clarity but also with a sardonic bite the strange behaviour to Shaw of the majority on the Joint Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament on the Censorship of Stage Plays. This Committee (its Report was published in 1909) called Shaw as a witness but refused by a bare majority to receive a statement which he wrote and, for the members' convenience, printed at his own expense. Prejudice and pride led the majority members into the fantastically comic imbroglio described by the author in the *Blanco Posnet* Preface, where he also reproduces in full The Rejected Statement—a document admirable as literature whether or not it is sound as argument.

Partly as a refuge from the censorship, partly as a refuge from the contest between actors and authors concerning the interpretation of the plays, and partly as a means of reaching out towards the non-playgoing public,

Shaw quickly took to printing his plays. Thinking of the great gain to English literature and drama if Shakespeare had interested himself in the publication of his plays and provided 'stage directions' throwing light on the author's own view of the characters, Shaw proceeded to supply such light for his own plays by amplifying the usual bare directions for entrances and exits into substantial information concerning 'the family and personal history of the individuals represented'. The art of presenting plays in print was to all intents and purposes an art originated by Shaw, and his discourse on this matter in the Preface to *Plays Unpleasant* therefore holds a unique place among the documents of modern English literary history.

If the false impression lingers anywhere that Shaw was by nature pig-headed and dictatorial, it should be dispelled by an attentive reading of that part of the Preface to *Plays Pleasant* which treats of the relationship between authors, actors, and the public. Playwrights are not invariably reasonable people; sometimes, indeed, they are of the opinion that actors and the public are leagued in conspiracy against them. Notwithstanding the slowness of his progress to success as a dramatic author, Shaw showed no tendency to blame theatre managers or playgoers. He was fully aware that the new kind of drama he was endeavouring to establish raised difficulties for actors and audiences. Far from developing a grievance against any who did not attend his plays, he warned those with no capacity for serious drama that they should stay away. But although he had no intention of purveying to the public what the public at that time believed it wanted, he did set himself to make as palatable as possible what he wanted the public to want.

He recognized that changes in public taste can only be effected by leading the public to believe that the new taste has been acquired of its own volition. He said in the *Plays Pleasant* Preface (1898) that he had no grievance against the theatres for not welcoming him with open arms; he detailed clear-sightedly the causes which made his works 'difficult' for players and spectators alike: 'Beyond the difficulties thus raised by the nature and quality of my work, I have none to complain of. I have come upon no ill will, no inaccessibility, on the part of the very few managers with whom I have discussed it.' There is a career, he wrote, 'no harder of access than any cognate career, for all qualified playwrights who bring the manager what his customers want and understand, or even enough of it to induce them to swallow at the same time a great deal that they neither want nor understand; for the public is touchingly humble in such matters.'

The constitution and tastes of London audiences and the nature of the fare provided for them in the theatres at that time (1900) is the opening theme of the Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*. This leads to a discussion of the prevalent stage sensuousness and sensuality, through which the sex instinct—since it cannot find frank, healthy, and natural expression on the stage—is side-tracked into sentimental romanticism which depicts life through a haze of pretence. Believing that 'all institutions have in the long run to live by the nature of things, and not by childish pretendings', Shaw called upon modern Puritans to rescue the theatre from the voluptuaries and offered his *Plays for Puritans* as a counterblast to the 'systematic idolatry of sensuousness'.

Much of the interest stirred by the Preface to this volume was concentrated upon the section headed

'Better than Shakespeare?' The immediate occasion of this question was not to settle whether Shaw's plays or Shakespeare's are the better, but whether 'human strength of the Caesarian type' as presented in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a more desirable spectacle than the 'faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery' in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Morality instinctively prefers the former, leaving out of all account the difficult, perhaps insoluble, problem of whether the effect of Shakespeare's poetry is not to cleanse the debauchery and to make *Anthony and Cleopatra* finally more elevating than the puritan prose morality of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. To Shaw the problem was a perfectly clear and plain moral problem; he would have considered it invalid for a disputant to introduce any question of aesthetics, or to call upon Aristotle for support by introducing the classical theory of purgation by poetic tragedy. Here a deadlock would inevitably be reached, for if Shaw's claim that he possessed normal sight, moral as well as physical, was sound, his state was not entirely blessed. Though he would recognize departures from the norm, his own normality would disable him from understanding the non-normal. In short, a prose universe would be wide open to him, but not a poetic one. Imponderables cannot be swept aside when human character is judged under the aspect of eternity. At the time he wrote the Preface to *Caesar and Cleopatra* Shaw took little account of imponderables, and in his code there was no place for what he would have thought to be moral hairsplitting. He refused to concede that sexual infatuation could be a tragic theme; but since there can be no denying that sexual infatuation has frequently been a tragic fact in human history, it long ago established itself of necessity as a tragic

theme for creative writers, independently of whether any particular writer refused to admit it to tragic status.

Shaw's question 'Better than Shakespeare?' was therefore a moral or philosophical question. He was specific about that: 'It does not follow . . . that the right to criticize Shakespeare involves the power of writing better plays. . . . It is the philosophy, the outlook on life, that changes, not the craft of the playwright.' No subject on which Shaw wrote created a greater intensity of fury against him than the observations on Shakespeare he made at intervals over many years. The fury was, however, a waste of mental and nervous energy. Even if he had claimed to be better than Shakespeare the claim could have done no injury to Shakespeare's reputation. What Shaw did in fact say was: '. . . when we search for examples of a prodigious command of language and of graphic line, we can think of nobody better than Shakespeare and Michael Angelo'. He pointed out the improbability that there would be any such improvement in the arts of expression as would enable anyone to say what he had to say better than Homer or Shakespeare. 'But the humblest author . . . may profess to have something to say by this time that neither Homer nor Shakespeare said.' This is an altogether unexceptionable statement, unless it is believed that the world should have stopped thinking in 1616.

The Preface to *Man and Superman* is in the form of an 'Epistle Dedicatory to Arthur Bingham Walkley', dramatic critic of *The Times*, who had asked Shaw why he did not write a Don Juan play. After some friendly badinage, Shaw points out that not a single one of Don Juan's thousand and three amorous adventures comes into his play, a curious omission which he explains

by referring back to the Preface to *Plays for Puritans* with its insistence that in the sex-ridden contemporary English drama there is no presentation of the realities of sexual attraction: all is evasion. He assumes that Walkley did not desire an amorous Don Juan play of that emasculated type, 'so I took it that you demanded a Don Juan in the philosophic sense'. Having surveyed the several Don Juans who have appeared in literature and music since the character was first dramatized (by Tirso de Molina in *El Burlador de Sevilla*) in the sixteenth century, Shaw comes round to his theme that a modern Juan would not dare to outrage convention as Byron's 'vagabond libertine' did after the original Don Juan, a Promethean enemy of God, had been romanticized and sensualized by later writers into the advocate of freedom in love and morality. In modern society, 'in which the serious business of sex is left by men to women'—for the business of the ordinary woman is (or was, still, in 1903) to get married—'the woman always takes the initiative'. 'And so,' writes Shaw to Walkley, 'your Don Juan has come to birth as a stage projection of the tragi-comic love chase of the man by the woman;' but 'The woman's need of him to enable her to carry on Nature's most urgent work, does not prevail against him until his resistance gathers her energy to a climax at which she dares to throw away her customary exploitations of the conventional affectionate and dutiful poses, and claim him by natural right for a purpose that far transcends their mortal personal purposes.'

The physically creative woman, impelled by a force beyond herself to marry so that the race shall not perish, may have the misfortune, however, to be drawn to the artist or the thinker or the preacher in whom the aesthetic or the cerebral or the spiritual urge to create

is irresistible: these are the men of genius who are, in Shaw's words, 'selected by Nature to carry on the work of building up 'an intellectual consciousness'. Such a man 'will risk the stake and the cross; starve, when necessary, in a garret all his life' and sacrifice others with no more scruple than he devotes himself to the dictate of his genius. In his own case, it was Shaw's mother who had to sacrifice herself for some years to feed and clothe him until his creative gifts bore their long-delayed harvest.

From such fundamental considerations Shaw digresses to political accidentals, though here too there are many more-than-ephemeral phrases. There is a surprisingly nineteen-fiftyish accent in, for example, '. . . our eyes and hearts turn eagerly to the American millionaire. As his hand goes down to his pocket, our fingers go up to the brims of our hats by instinct.' Following the political passages come reflections on Dickens, Shakespeare, and Bunyan, authors whom Shaw recognized as having a 'peculiar sense of the world' akin to his own, though he did not find that the first two of this trio had coordinated 'their pregnant observations and demonstrations of life' into any philosophy or religion. Of Bunyan he writes with fervour as one who identified himself with the purpose of the world as he understood it. In Mr. Valiant Shaw found a genuine proponent of the Shavian doctrine of the Life Force, and Mr. Valiant's great words as he looks back from the brink of the river of death moved Shaw to write one of his own finest passages: 'This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish little clod of ailments and grievances complain-

ing that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.'

Nothing in imaginative literature is more exasperating than to be told that a character is a genius, or in some lesser degree a person of intellectual quality, yet to be given no evidence beyond the author's unsupported word. A few minutes after the first scene of *Man and Superman* opens Roebuck Ramsden flourishes a book by John Tanner and describes it with apoplectic violence of language as infamous . . . scandalous . . . blackguardly . . . filth. Thorough in everything, Shaw prints this horrific work at the end of the play. *The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion*, by John Tanner, M.I.R.C. (Member of the Idle Rich Class), contains chapters on Good Breeding, Property and Marriage, The Perfectionist Experiment at Oneida Creek (a communistic settlement in America in 1848), Man's Objection to His Own Improvement, The Political Need for the Superman, Prudery Explained, Progress an Illusion (containing, *inter alia*, a discourse on the Fabian Society), The Conceit of Civilization, The Verdict of History ('Our only hope . . . is in evolution. We must replace the man by the superman. . . . We must eliminate the Yahoo, or his vote will wreck the commonwealth.'), and The Method (in brief, the endowment of parenthood). A further work, *Maxims for Revolutionists*, which follows the *Handbook* contains many of Shaw's most notable epigrams; one which came to have a darker significance than when he wrote it runs, 'Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.'

After *Man and Superman* Shaw's Prefaces ranged over subjects which, however large and important in themselves, may in the long run seem to have little vital

connection with his own creative work. In his way of thinking he was ahead of his time, and most of his polemical writings had the immediate attraction of expressing views that were shocking to many and novel to as many more. As general thought catches up with Shaw's and then outstrips it, a good deal of his non-dramatic work is bound to become outmoded. More and more, Shaw the literary artist will increase in stature to the detriment of Shaw the polymath. Although as a playwright he professed to turn his back on art, art is being revenged upon him.

Thus, while *John Bull's Other Island* remains as fresh and sparkling as an Irish stream, the Preface accompanying it, dealing with Anglo-Irish divergences in politics and religion, is only preserved from the fate of cartloads of other political and doctrinal tracts in being better written.

Shaw's own literary ancestry is related in the Preface to *Major Barbara* to the nineteenth-century Irish novelist Charles Lever, from whom he drew inspiration for his own dealing in 'the tragi-comic irony of the conflict between real life and the romantic imagination'; to Belfort Bax's essays on feminist matters and contemporary morality; and to Samuel Butler for the conviction that 'the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty', the conviction which is the root principle in the gospel of Andrew Undershaft the munitions magnate in *Major Barbara*. The tendency to regard the medical profession as infallible is challenged in the Preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma*, while vivisection and vaccination are also among the matters discussed there. Views on marriage and divorce and the sex slavery of wives are given in the *Getting Married* Preface; and in that to *Misalliance*, on Parents and Children, Shaw expressed at

length his belief that every child is a new vessel of the Life Force, which parents and teachers may either nurture or destroy according to the wisdom or folly or brutality exercised in upbringing and education. 'What is a child? An experiment. A fresh attempt to produce the just man made perfect: that is, to make humanity divine.'

To *Androcles and the Lion*, a comedy of primitive Christianity in action, is attached a Preface on the Prospects of Christianity, in which Shaw acknowledged that he could see no other way out of the world's misery than 'the way which would have been found by Christ's will if He had undertaken the work of a modern practical statesman'. In order to establish what Jesus actually believed and taught, Shaw analyses the four Gospels and reaches the conclusion that the doctrine of Christ was a pure Communism based upon four main tenets: (1) The kingdom of heaven is within and we are members one of another. (2) Get rid of property by throwing it into the common stock. (3) Get rid of judges and punishments and revenge. (4) Get rid of family entanglements which prevent the carrying out of appointed work. The first requirement, Shaw believed and continued to advocate, was equality of income for everyone: Society must assume the responsibility of keeping every person alive and every person must refrain (or be restrained) from idling.

The First World War provided a wealth of material for the Preface (written in 1919) to *Heartbreak House*. Diagnosing the diseases of European society which created the conditions from which the war arose, Shaw accused the cultured people of idling and pleasuring, so

that their lives were futile. 'They hated politics. They did not wish to realize Utopia for the common people: they wished to realize their favorite fictions and poems in their own lives; and, when they could, they lived without scruple on incomes which they did nothing to earn.' This culpable indifference and neglect, as Shaw believed it to be, had been aggravated by half a century of 'pseudo-science' which swept aside the belief in salvation and damnation and taught that 'human beings are produced by their environment, their sins and good deeds being only a series of chemical and mechanical reactions over which they have no control'. Superstition and quackery abounded, and conscience was banished from human affairs. 'Heartbreak House, in short, did not know how to live, at which point all that was left to it was the boast that at least it knew how to die: . . .'

What seemed to Shaw the only possible remedy for this calamitous state of affairs became the subject of *Back to Methuselah*. Only if the duration of human life could be extended far beyond its present term would men and women come to think it worth while to concentrate upon the art of living as they now do upon the art of dying. The Preface to this cycle of plays is Shaw's fullest statement of his faith. In the later part of his life he described himself as a Creative Evolutionist, and *Back to Methuselah* with its Preface is Shaw's bible of Creative Evolution, i.e. of the will of man to evolve to a higher and longer-lived organism: '. . . the will to do anything can and does, at a certain pitch of intensity set up by conviction of its necessity, create and organize new tissue to do it with'. The Postscript written in 1944 for the Oxford University Press's World's Classics edition of *Back to Methuselah* is in effect a supplementary

preface. In it, Shaw speaks of the physical disabilities which age was forcing upon him in his eighty-ninth year, 'yet', he continues, 'my mind still feels capable of growth; for my curiosity is keener than ever. My soul goes marching on; and if the Life Force would give me a body as durable as my mind, and I knew better how to feed and lodge and dress and behave, I might begin a political career as a junior civil servant and evolve into a capable Cabinet Minister in another hundred years or so.'

Plato, as a poet philosopher, is still read with pleasure and even with enthusiasm by many who are indifferent or antagonistic to his political ideas. It may be that twenty-five centuries from now our descendants will take much the same view of *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928) and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944) as non-political readers now take of Plato's Republic. Yet it is improbable that Shaw's two lengthy volumes (of over 500 and nearly 400 pages respectively) will long continue to be read for anything but the attraction of listening with the inward ear to the cadences of Shaw's prose, which is nevertheless a plain workmanlike prose with no studied aesthetic graces. It would be presumptuous and useless to attempt to give here any commentary on the argument of these two books, both of which advocate the principles of socialism with many Shavian digressions and asides. Both books have two major drawbacks: first, that they say nothing that had not been said better—or at least implied plainly—in the author's earlier writings; second, that Shaw over-estimated the assimilative capacity of the average brain. After reading a few pages the reader feels himself slowly but irresistibly overborne by the

sheer mass of words and notions. As a body of political theory and doctrine these volumes have the further disadvantage of being very largely derivative, and, therefore, they hold little primary interest for students.

Shaw was inclined to overvalue his non-dramatic writings and to commit in them the faults he avoided instinctively in his plays. Like many writers before him, he was an unsure judge of his own powers and even of the real nature of his talent. He was a true artist who perversely masqueraded for much of his life as an artist *manqué*. He belied his own epigram: 'He who can does; he who cannot teaches.' He was a doer, i.e. a *maker* in the old sense of a *creator*. Viewing his creative powers too diffidently—it might even seem, at times, contemptuously—he gave to mere pedagogy much that might have gone to the further enrichment of man's imaginative and spiritual heritage, to which Shaw at the lowest estimate nevertheless contributed more than any other contemporary writer.

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